

A RENAISSANCE OF WONDER

Nine Short Plays by
Lord Dunsany

Introduction by
Aladdin Collar

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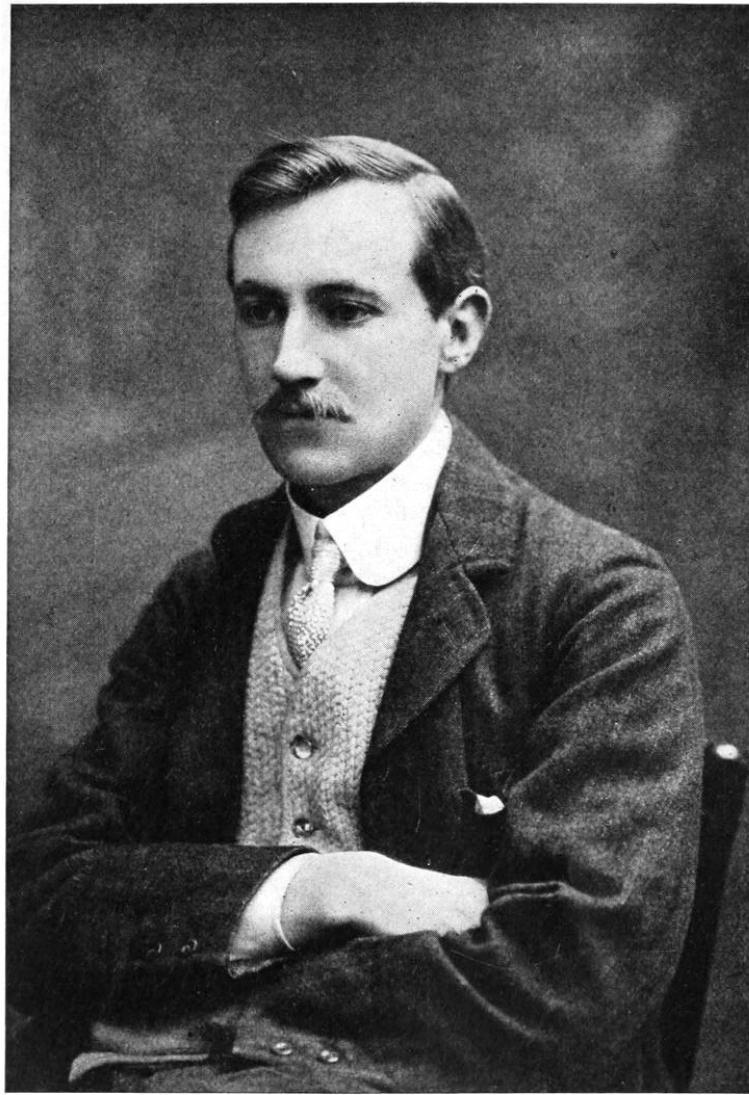
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Courtesy of Mitchell Kennerley

EDWARD JOHN MORETON DRAX PLUNKETT, LORD DUNSANY

Introduction

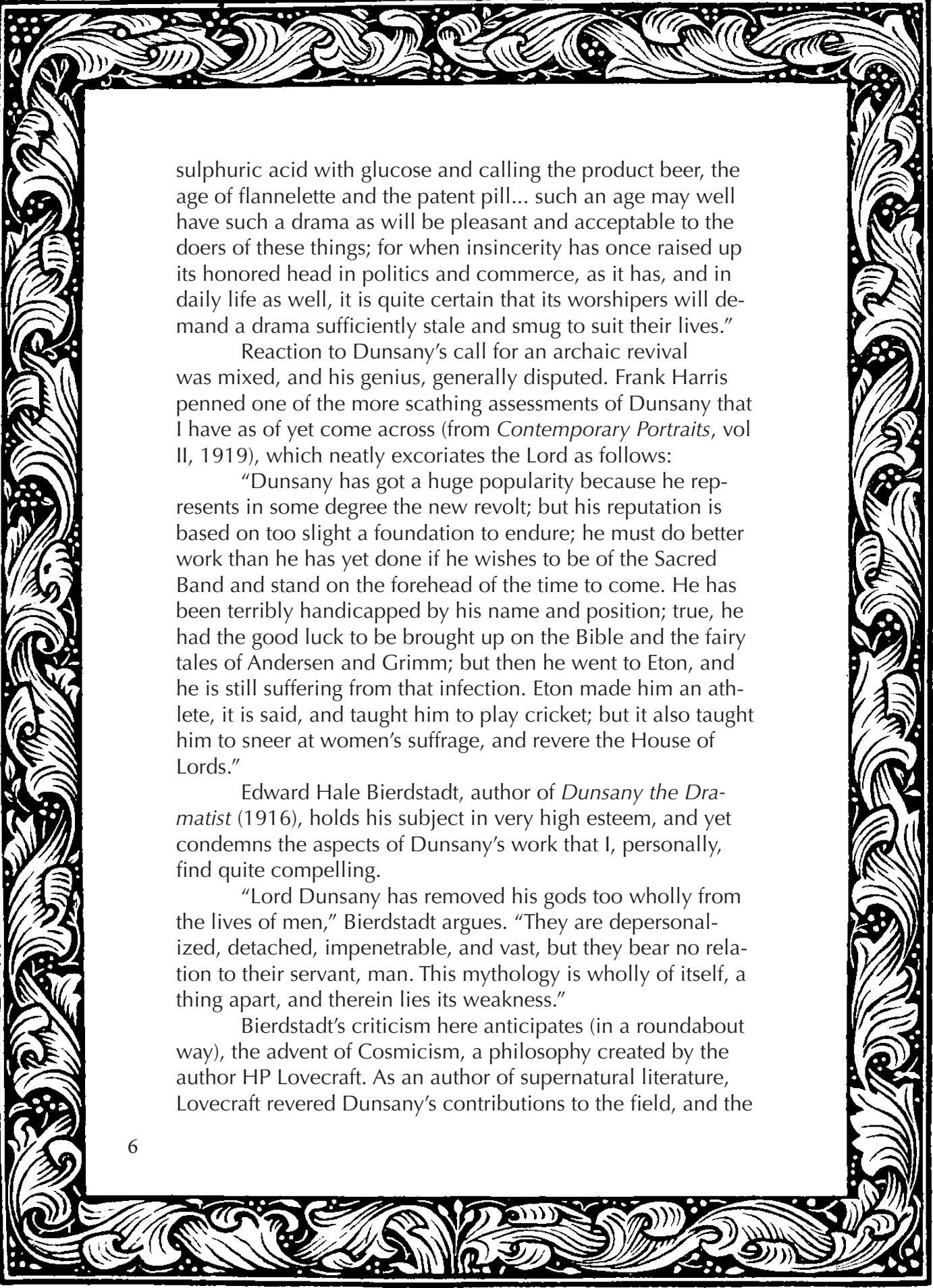
by Aladdin Collar

In a 1916 letter to Stuart Walker, Lord Dunsany admits that his very first play, *The Glittering Gate*, was written 'chiefly to please Yeats,' and that the play never interested him. As an author, Dunsany's primary focus had been short stories of romance and wonder; 'fantasy,' as we have come to refer to the genre today.

By the time that *The Glittering Gate* was produced (in 1909, at W.B. Yeats' Abbey Theater in Dublin), Dunsany had already published three volumes of his wonder tales (*The Gods of Pegana*, 1905, *Time and the Gods*, 1906, and *The Sword of Welleran*, 1908). He was well-established, then (as a romanticist, if not a playwright), when Dunsany released his first manifesto railing against the state of the modern theater: *Romance and the Modern Stage* was published in the *National Review* of London in 1911, and it serves as a thesis for Dunsany's approach to dramatic literature.

"Something must be wrong with an age whose drama deserts romance; and a cause that soonest occurs to one is the alarming spread of advertisement, its frightful vulgarity, and its whole-hearted devotion to the snaring of money."

He goes on: "The drama is the mirror of life if not something more. And an age that paints its woodwork red to ape mahogany, that makes respected fortunes by mixing-up



sulphuric acid with glucose and calling the product beer, the age of flannelette and the patent pill... such an age may well have such a drama as will be pleasant and acceptable to the doers of these things; for when insincerity has once raised up its honored head in politics and commerce, as it has, and in daily life as well, it is quite certain that its worshipers will demand a drama sufficiently stale and smug to suit their lives."

Reaction to Dunsany's call for an archaic revival was mixed, and his genius, generally disputed. Frank Harris penned one of the more scathing assessments of Dunsany that I have as of yet come across (from *Contemporary Portraits*, vol II, 1919), which neatly excoriates the Lord as follows:

"Dunsany has got a huge popularity because he represents in some degree the new revolt; but his reputation is based on too slight a foundation to endure; he must do better work than he has yet done if he wishes to be of the Sacred Band and stand on the forehead of the time to come. He has been terribly handicapped by his name and position; true, he had the good luck to be brought up on the Bible and the fairy tales of Andersen and Grimm; but then he went to Eton, and he is still suffering from that infection. Eton made him an athlete, it is said, and taught him to play cricket; but it also taught him to sneer at women's suffrage, and revere the House of Lords."

Edward Hale Bierdstadt, author of *Dunsany the Dramatist* (1916), holds his subject in very high esteem, and yet condemns the aspects of Dunsany's work that I, personally, find quite compelling.

"Lord Dunsany has removed his gods too wholly from the lives of men," Bierdstadt argues. "They are depersonalized, detached, impenetrable, and vast, but they bear no relation to their servant, man. This mythology is wholly of itself, a thing apart, and therein lies its weakness."

Bierdstadt's criticism here anticipates (in a roundabout way), the advent of Cosmicism, a philosophy created by the author HP Lovecraft. As an author of supernatural literature, Lovecraft revered Dunsany's contributions to the field, and the

influence of Dunsany upon Lovecraft can be found throughout Lovecraft's fiction, especially his Dream-Cycle. Cosmic indifferentism is one of many ways in which this influence manifests.

Bierstadt, in his assessment of Dunsany's pantheon, also overlooks the literary power in the as-of-yet unnamed art of mythopoeia; the development of fictional mythologies in order to develop worlds of high fantasy. The term was coined by J.R.R. Tolkein to describe Tolkein's approach to fantasy literature, which was also influenced by the wonder tales of Lord Dunsany.

Other contemporary voices, meanwhile, were more favorable to Dunsany's work. In *Seen on the Stage* (1920), Clayton Meeker Hamilton writes: "Lord Dunsany is the most original playwright who thus far appeared since the nineteenth century was laid away in lavender. His work seems strange and new; because, instead of striving, like most of his contemporaries, to be always 'up to date,' he prefers to contemplate the momentary deeds of time through the telescope of eternity."

In *Appreciations and Depreciations: Irish Literary Studies* (1917), Ernest Augustus Boyd praises the mythopoetic elements: "To have invented a theogony is, in the days of realism, no common achievement. Where his contemporaries are content to revive the imaginative world of Irish legend, Lord Dunsany has created a mythology of his own."

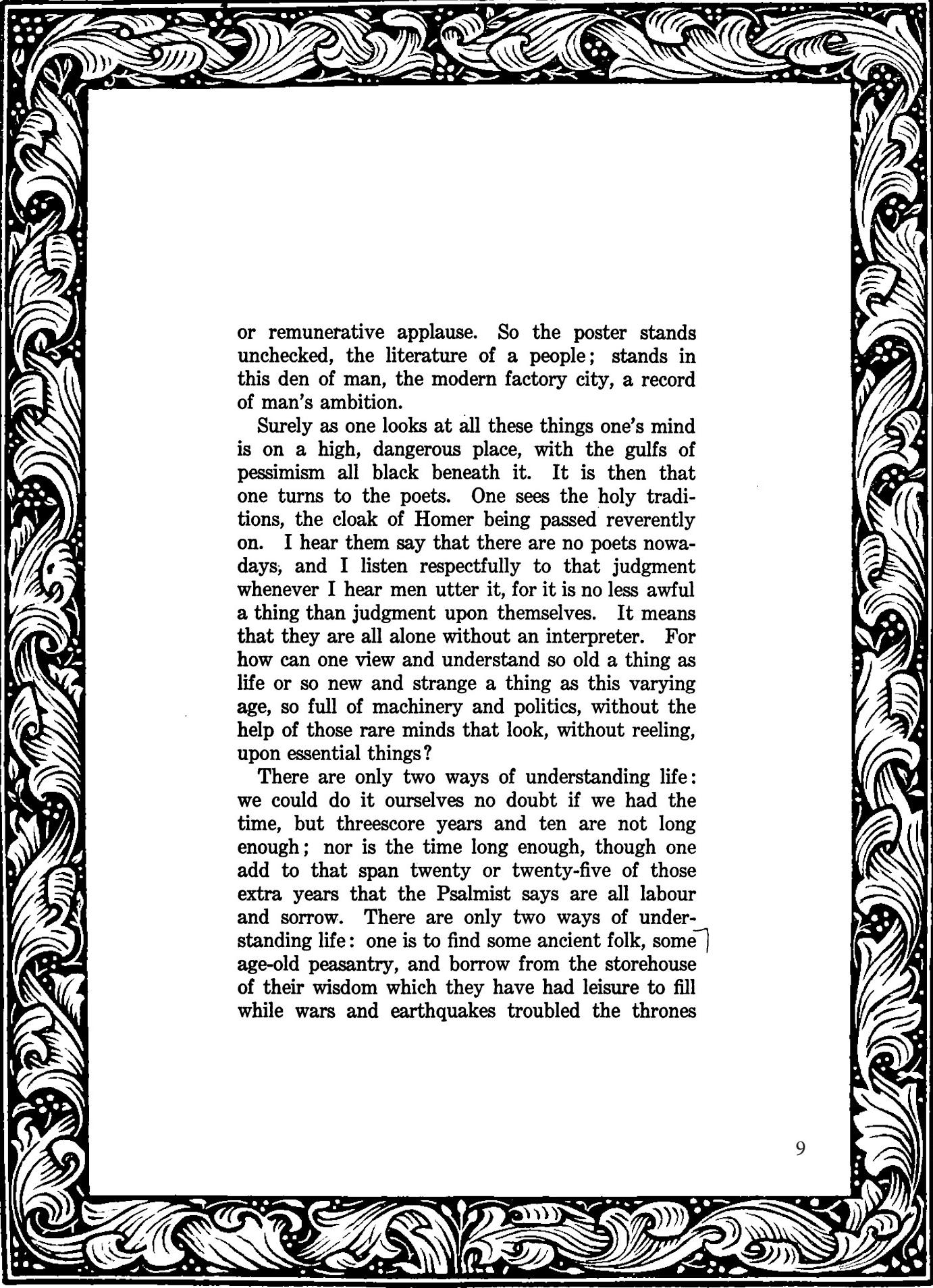
As a writer of manifestos, Dunsany was not quite satisfied with his *Romance and the Modern Stage*, and he returned to attack the modern world again the next year, in a lecture titled "Nowadays," delivered at a dinner of the Poet's Club in London. I came across the piece while writing this very introduction, and have decided to include it in full, so that Lord Dunsany can set his own stage (so to speak) for *A Renaissance of Wonder*.

-Aladdin Lee Grant Rutledge Collar,
May 6th, 2020
from his desk in Arkham, MA

NOWADAYS

(Dedicated to the Poets' Club)

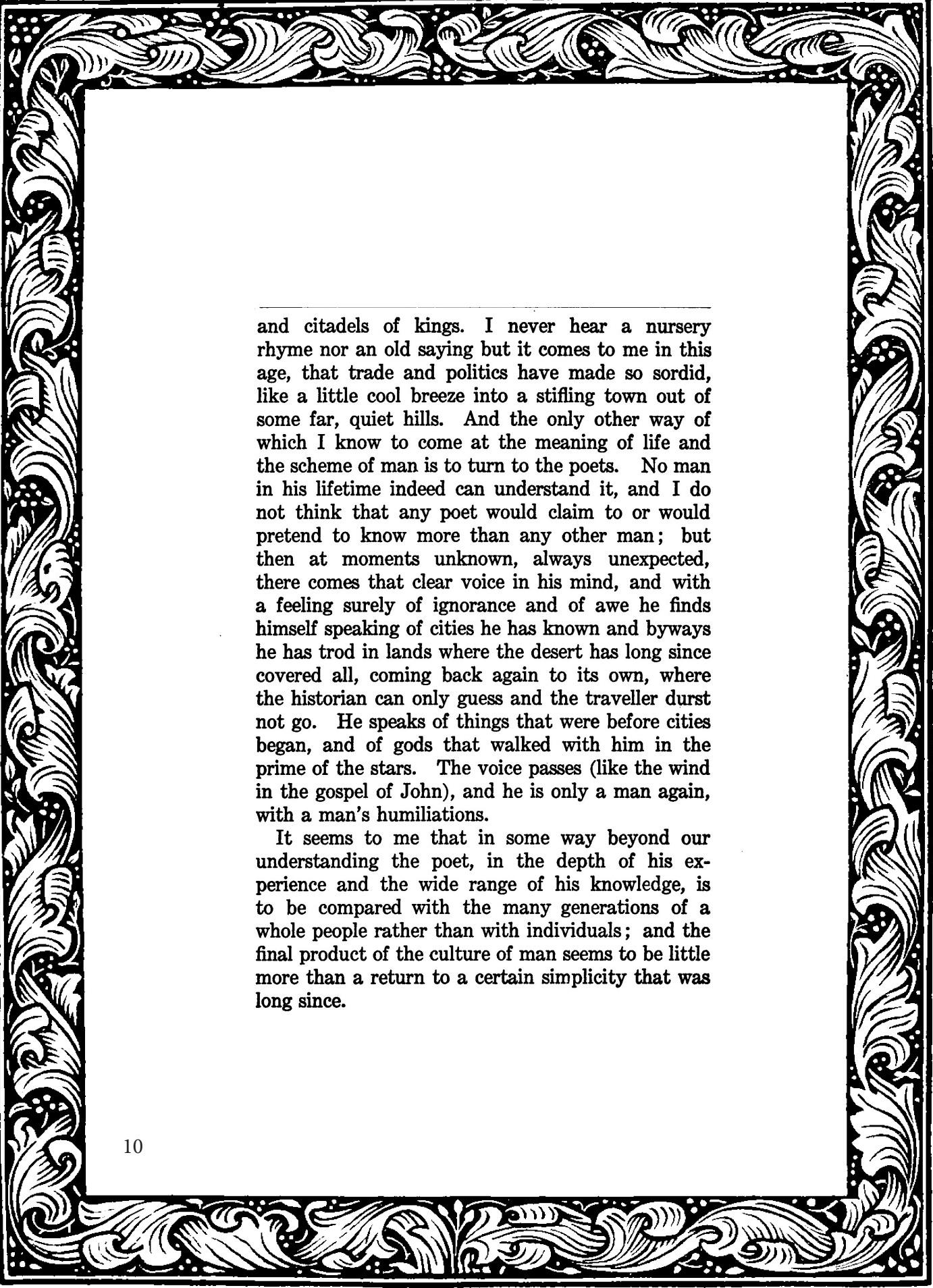
I WILL ask the reader to approach with me in fancy any great city. Let us suppose the open country to be already behind us, a sombre look has come upon the sky, a trodden look on the grass; the air has the look of brooding over some regrettable thing; the hoardings, always ugly, always false, often indecent, which have been with us all day into distant wolds, multiply here, and suddenly the mean streets rush on us. And how terrible is their meanness. The poorest cottager beyond in the country, the remote dweller in tents, even houseless wanderers, may turn at any moment, however hard their lot, to the hills, the wild wind, the heath, to something that is not in itself base, but is part of a scheme in which the stars themselves have part. But in a town! The night is a glare of factories, and the day an asset. And night and day they are reading, reading, reading — children and grown men always reading, whether they will or not. Reading, reading, reading, till they hardly even know that they read any longer. And what do they read? All that is basest. All the mean, cunning words of the advertiser praising his poisonous wares which no Government dare put down because they know that the power of the fraudulent cure is too great to be attacked either with safety



or remunerative applause. So the poster stands unchecked, the literature of a people; stands in this den of man, the modern factory city, a record of man's ambition.

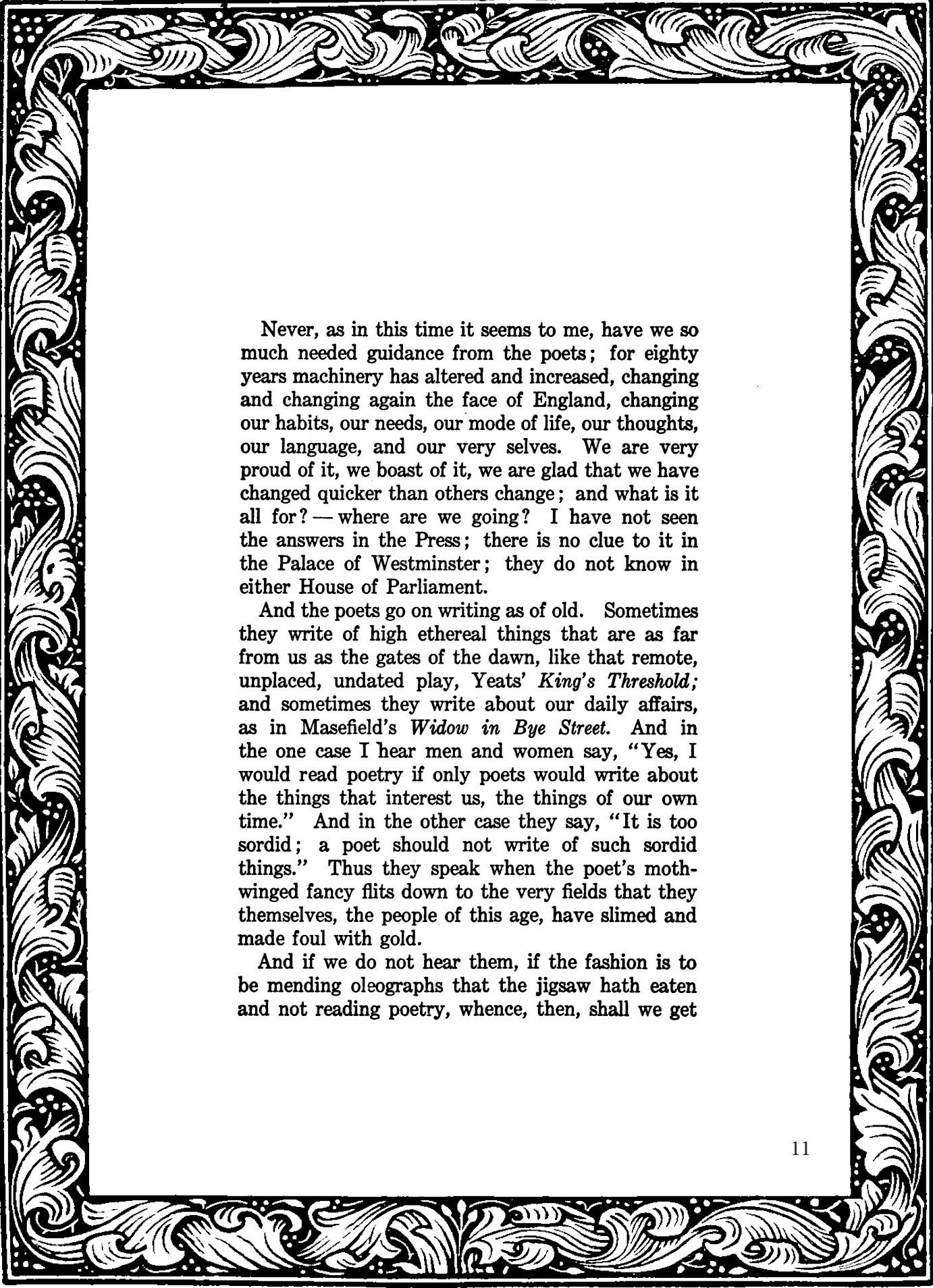
Surely as one looks at all these things one's mind is on a high, dangerous place, with the gulfs of pessimism all black beneath it. It is then that one turns to the poets. One sees the holy traditions, the cloak of Homer being passed reverently on. I hear them say that there are no poets nowadays, and I listen respectfully to that judgment whenever I hear men utter it, for it is no less awful a thing than judgment upon themselves. It means that they are all alone without an interpreter. For how can one view and understand so old a thing as life or so new and strange a thing as this varying age, so full of machinery and politics, without the help of those rare minds that look, without reeling, upon essential things?

There are only two ways of understanding life: we could do it ourselves no doubt if we had the time, but threescore years and ten are not long enough; nor is the time long enough, though one add to that span twenty or twenty-five of those extra years that the Psalmist says are all labour and sorrow. There are only two ways of understanding life: one is to find some ancient folk, some age-old peasantry, and borrow from the storehouse of their wisdom which they have had leisure to fill while wars and earthquakes troubled the thrones



and citadels of kings. I never hear a nursery rhyme nor an old saying but it comes to me in this age, that trade and politics have made so sordid, like a little cool breeze into a stifling town out of some far, quiet hills. And the only other way of which I know to come at the meaning of life and the scheme of man is to turn to the poets. No man in his lifetime indeed can understand it, and I do not think that any poet would claim to or would pretend to know more than any other man; but then at moments unknown, always unexpected, there comes that clear voice in his mind, and with a feeling surely of ignorance and of awe he finds himself speaking of cities he has known and byways he has trod in lands where the desert has long since covered all, coming back again to its own, where the historian can only guess and the traveller durst not go. He speaks of things that were before cities began, and of gods that walked with him in the prime of the stars. The voice passes (like the wind in the gospel of John), and he is only a man again, with a man's humiliations.

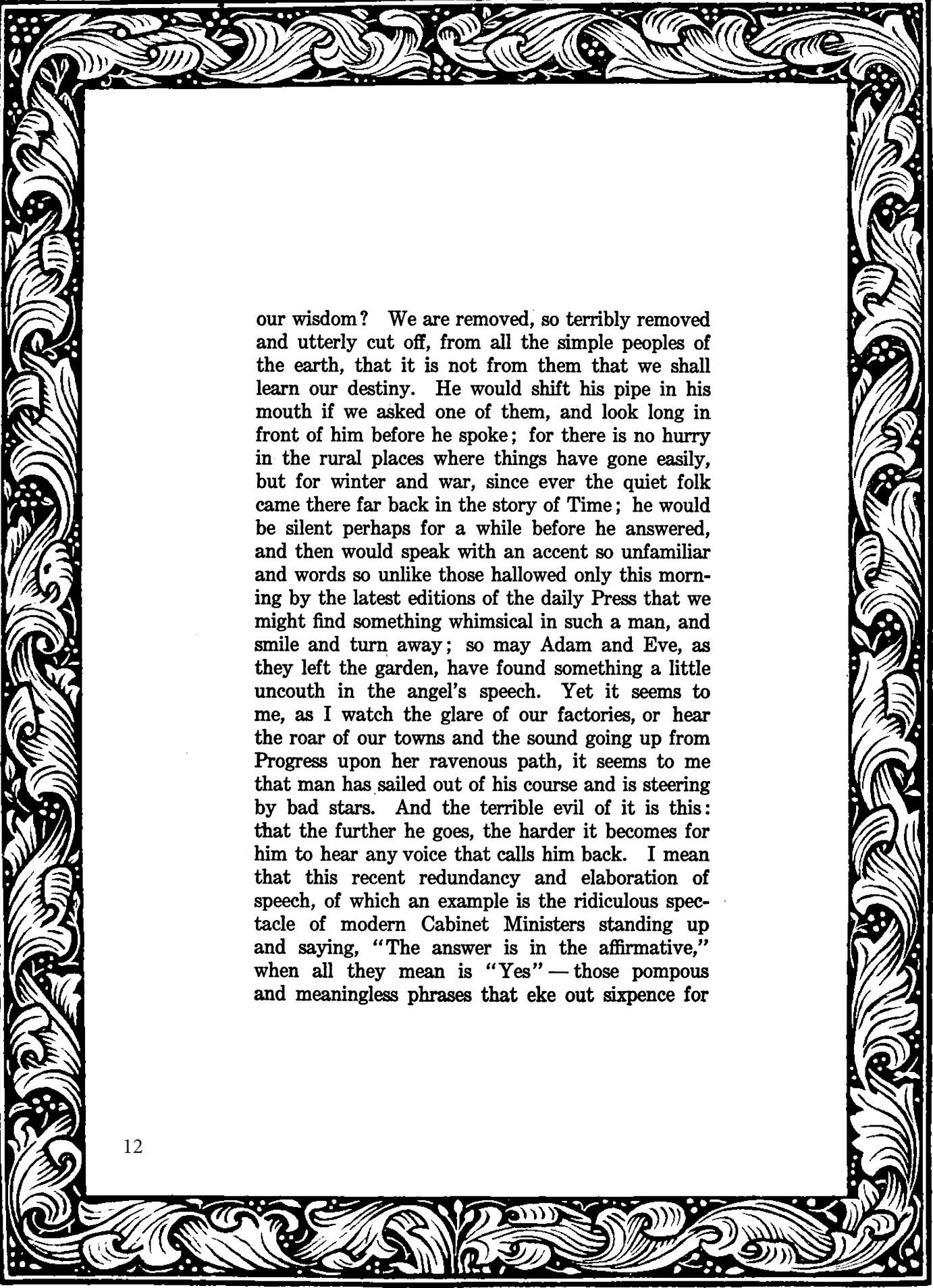
It seems to me that in some way beyond our understanding the poet, in the depth of his experience and the wide range of his knowledge, is to be compared with the many generations of a whole people rather than with individuals; and the final product of the culture of man seems to be little more than a return to a certain simplicity that was long since.



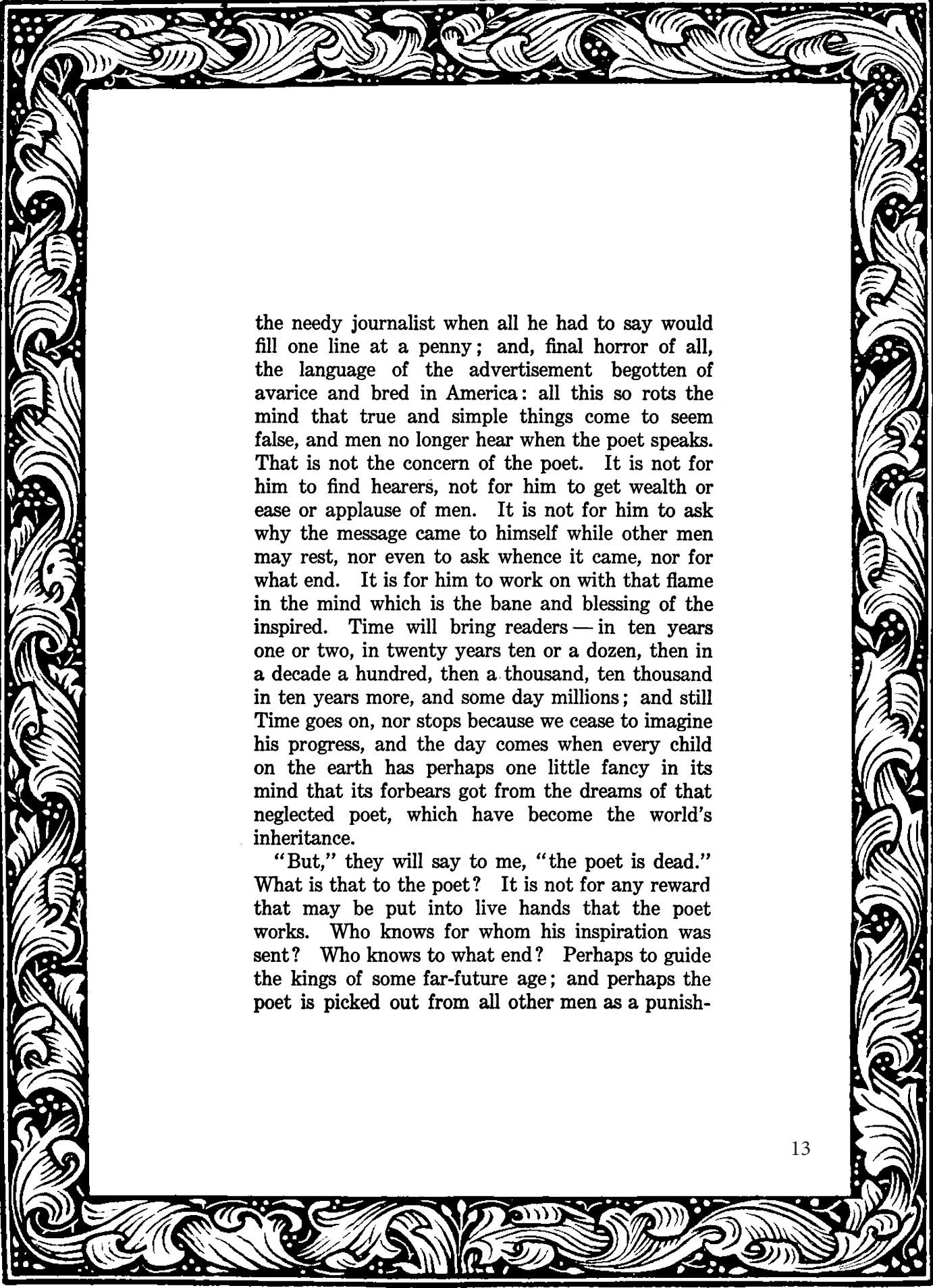
Never, as in this time it seems to me, have we so much needed guidance from the poets; for eighty years machinery has altered and increased, changing and changing again the face of England, changing our habits, our needs, our mode of life, our thoughts, our language, and our very selves. We are very proud of it, we boast of it, we are glad that we have changed quicker than others change; and what is it all for? — where are we going? I have not seen the answers in the Press; there is no clue to it in the Palace of Westminster; they do not know in either House of Parliament.

And the poets go on writing as of old. Sometimes they write of high ethereal things that are as far from us as the gates of the dawn, like that remote, unplaced, undated play, Yeats' *King's Threshold*; and sometimes they write about our daily affairs, as in Masefield's *Widow in Bye Street*. And in the one case I hear men and women say, "Yes, I would read poetry if only poets would write about the things that interest us, the things of our own time." And in the other case they say, "It is too sordid; a poet should not write of such sordid things." Thus they speak when the poet's moth-winged fancy flits down to the very fields that they themselves, the people of this age, have slimed and made foul with gold.

And if we do not hear them, if the fashion is to be mending oleographs that the jigsaw hath eaten and not reading poetry, whence, then, shall we get



our wisdom? We are removed, so terribly removed and utterly cut off, from all the simple peoples of the earth, that it is not from them that we shall learn our destiny. He would shift his pipe in his mouth if we asked one of them, and look long in front of him before he spoke; for there is no hurry in the rural places where things have gone easily, but for winter and war, since ever the quiet folk came there far back in the story of Time; he would be silent perhaps for a while before he answered, and then would speak with an accent so unfamiliar and words so unlike those hallowed only this morning by the latest editions of the daily Press that we might find something whimsical in such a man, and smile and turn away; so may Adam and Eve, as they left the garden, have found something a little uncouth in the angel's speech. Yet it seems to me, as I watch the glare of our factories, or hear the roar of our towns and the sound going up from Progress upon her ravenous path, it seems to me that man has sailed out of his course and is steering by bad stars. And the terrible evil of it is this: that the further he goes, the harder it becomes for him to hear any voice that calls him back. I mean that this recent redundancy and elaboration of speech, of which an example is the ridiculous spectacle of modern Cabinet Ministers standing up and saying, "The answer is in the affirmative," when all they mean is "Yes"—those pompous and meaningless phrases that eke out sixpence for

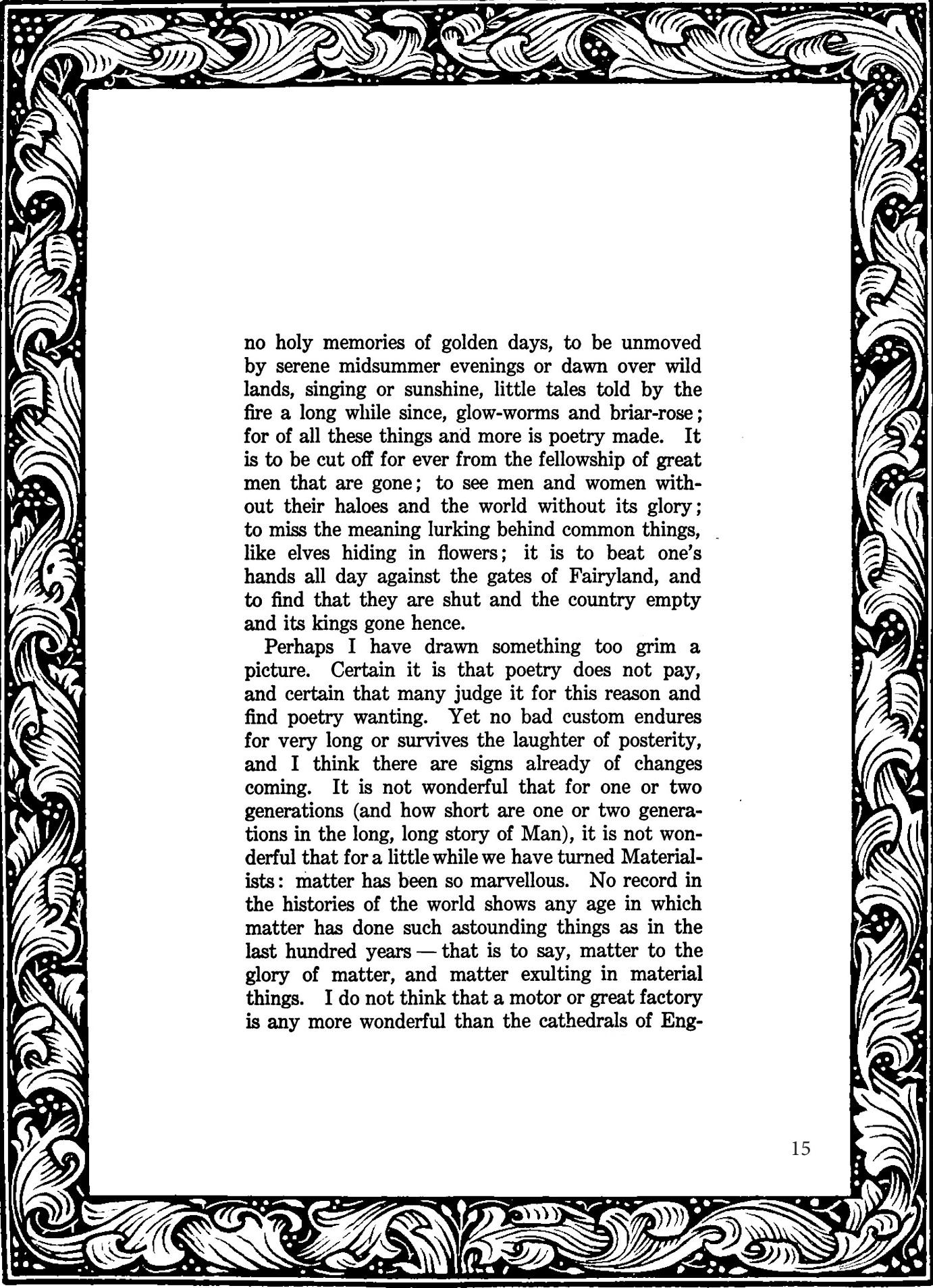


the needy journalist when all he had to say would fill one line at a penny ; and, final horror of all, the language of the advertisement begotten of avarice and bred in America : all this so rots the mind that true and simple things come to seem false, and men no longer hear when the poet speaks. That is not the concern of the poet. It is not for him to find hearers, not for him to get wealth or ease or applause of men. It is not for him to ask why the message came to himself while other men may rest, nor even to ask whence it came, nor for what end. It is for him to work on with that flame in the mind which is the bane and blessing of the inspired. Time will bring readers — in ten years one or two, in twenty years ten or a dozen, then in a decade a hundred, then a thousand, ten thousand in ten years more, and some day millions ; and still Time goes on, nor stops because we cease to imagine his progress, and the day comes when every child on the earth has perhaps one little fancy in its mind that its forbears got from the dreams of that neglected poet, which have become the world's inheritance.

“But,” they will say to me, “the poet is dead.” What is that to the poet? It is not for any reward that may be put into live hands that the poet works. Who knows for whom his inspiration was sent? Who knows to what end? Perhaps to guide the kings of some far-future age; and perhaps the poet is picked out from all other men as a punish-

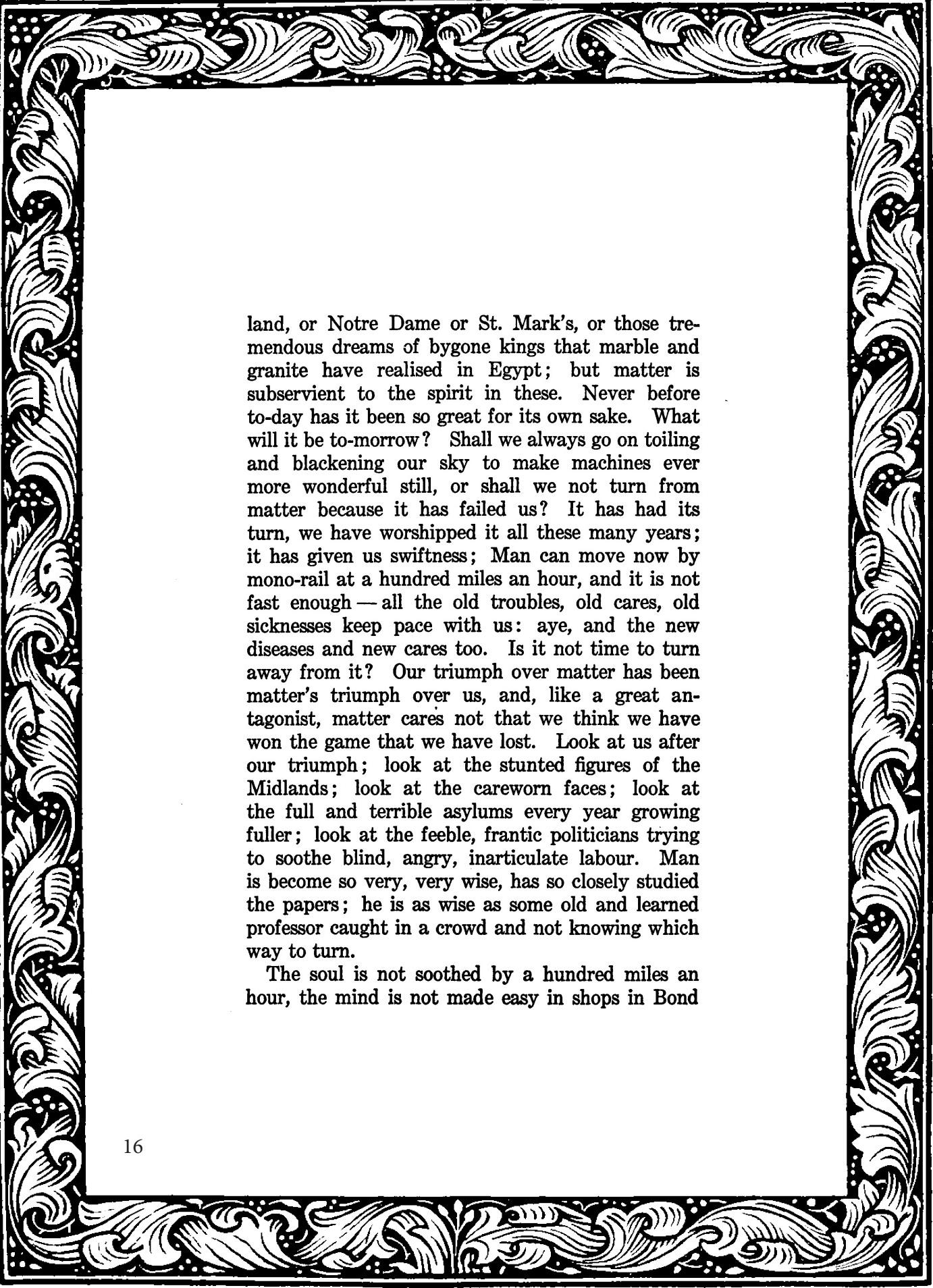
ment for some sin committed in other lands long, long ago, which the stars still remember.

They think that because they do not heed the poets they are right upon the course that they have chosen, right to make money by false patriotism and poisonous bread and adulterated wine, and that the poets are wrong. But the poets are never wrong, never have erred in the history of the world, have only failed (how many times they know) to give the message, but their inspiration comes sheer from the Palace of Truth, and what they say is beautiful is so, so long as they are true to their inspiration, and what they say is damnable is already damned in heaven. They reflect what is as lakes reflect it. Can a lake reflect three trees when there are only two, or can a white bird swimming on it seem black, or a crooked branch seem straight? They cannot be wrong, for they weave their work of sincerity, beauty, and truth; and evil days are in store for those prosperous cities that turn away from these things. Let them work on; it is not for them to find readers. But when the poet comes to an age that will not heed his words, let him shake off that dust that is flesh and pass hence; let him go back whither he has come; and not in the day of judgment only shall it be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that age, but in its own time its own people shall eke out their own damnation — for what is it to hate poetry? It is to have no little dreams and fancies,



no holy memories of golden days, to be unmoved by serene midsummer evenings or dawn over wild lands, singing or sunshine, little tales told by the fire a long while since, glow-worms and briar-rose; for of all these things and more is poetry made. It is to be cut off for ever from the fellowship of great men that are gone; to see men and women without their haloes and the world without its glory; to miss the meaning lurking behind common things, like elves hiding in flowers; it is to beat one's hands all day against the gates of Fairyland, and to find that they are shut and the country empty and its kings gone hence.

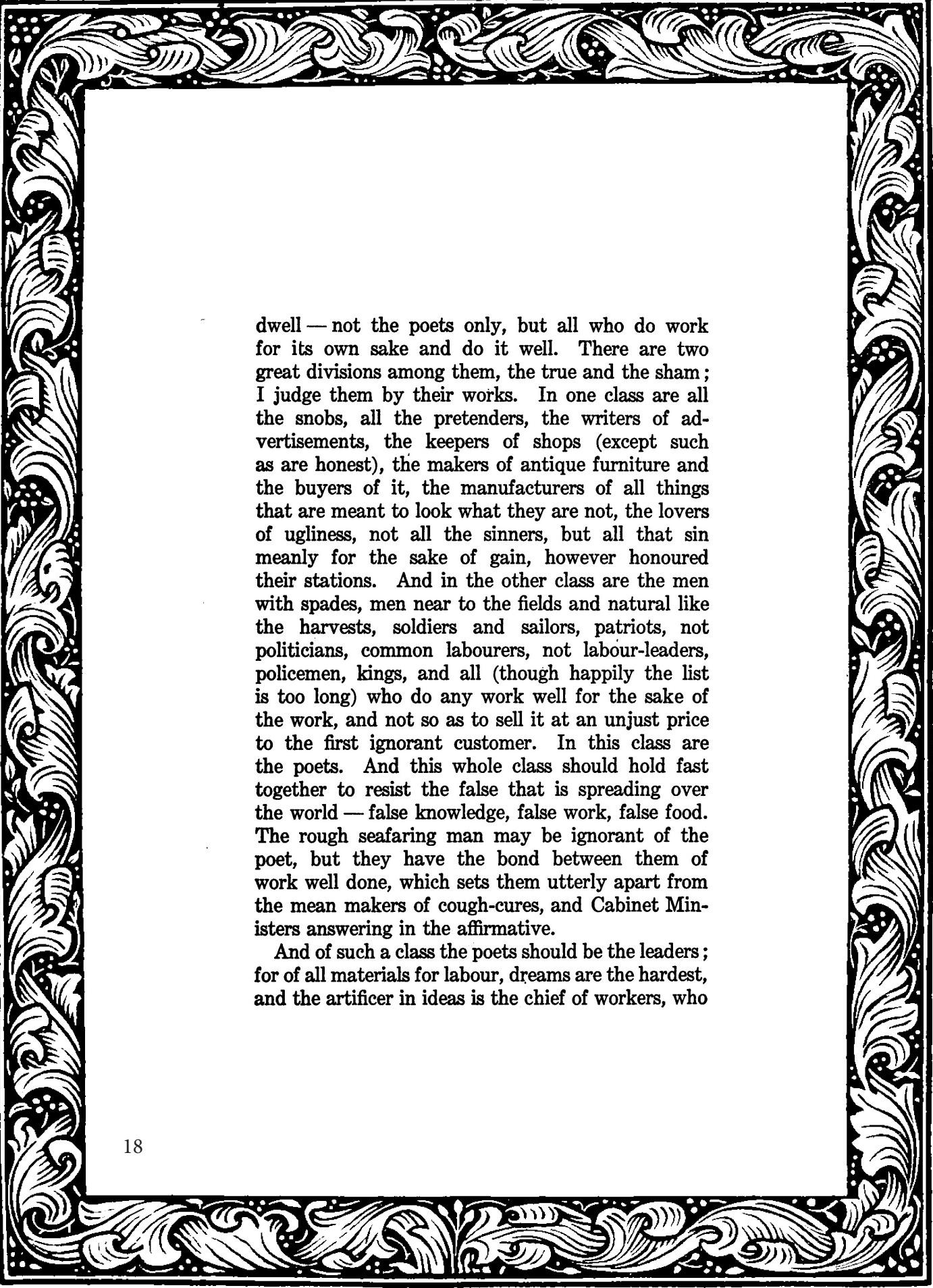
Perhaps I have drawn something too grim a picture. Certain it is that poetry does not pay, and certain that many judge it for this reason and find poetry wanting. Yet no bad custom endures for very long or survives the laughter of posterity, and I think there are signs already of changes coming. It is not wonderful that for one or two generations (and how short are one or two generations in the long, long story of Man), it is not wonderful that for a little while we have turned Materialists: matter has been so marvellous. No record in the histories of the world shows any age in which matter has done such astounding things as in the last hundred years — that is to say, matter to the glory of matter, and matter exulting in material things. I do not think that a motor or great factory is any more wonderful than the cathedrals of Eng-



land, or Notre Dame or St. Mark's, or those tremendous dreams of bygone kings that marble and granite have realised in Egypt; but matter is subservient to the spirit in these. Never before to-day has it been so great for its own sake. What will it be to-morrow? Shall we always go on toiling and blackening our sky to make machines ever more wonderful still, or shall we not turn from matter because it has failed us? It has had its turn, we have worshipped it all these many years; it has given us swiftness; Man can move now by mono-rail at a hundred miles an hour, and it is not fast enough — all the old troubles, old cares, old sicknesses keep pace with us: aye, and the new diseases and new cares too. Is it not time to turn away from it? Our triumph over matter has been matter's triumph over us, and, like a great antagonist, matter cares not that we think we have won the game that we have lost. Look at us after our triumph; look at the stunted figures of the Midlands; look at the careworn faces; look at the full and terrible asylums every year growing fuller; look at the feeble, frantic politicians trying to soothe blind, angry, inarticulate labour. Man is become so very, very wise, has so closely studied the papers; he is as wise as some old and learned professor caught in a crowd and not knowing which way to turn.

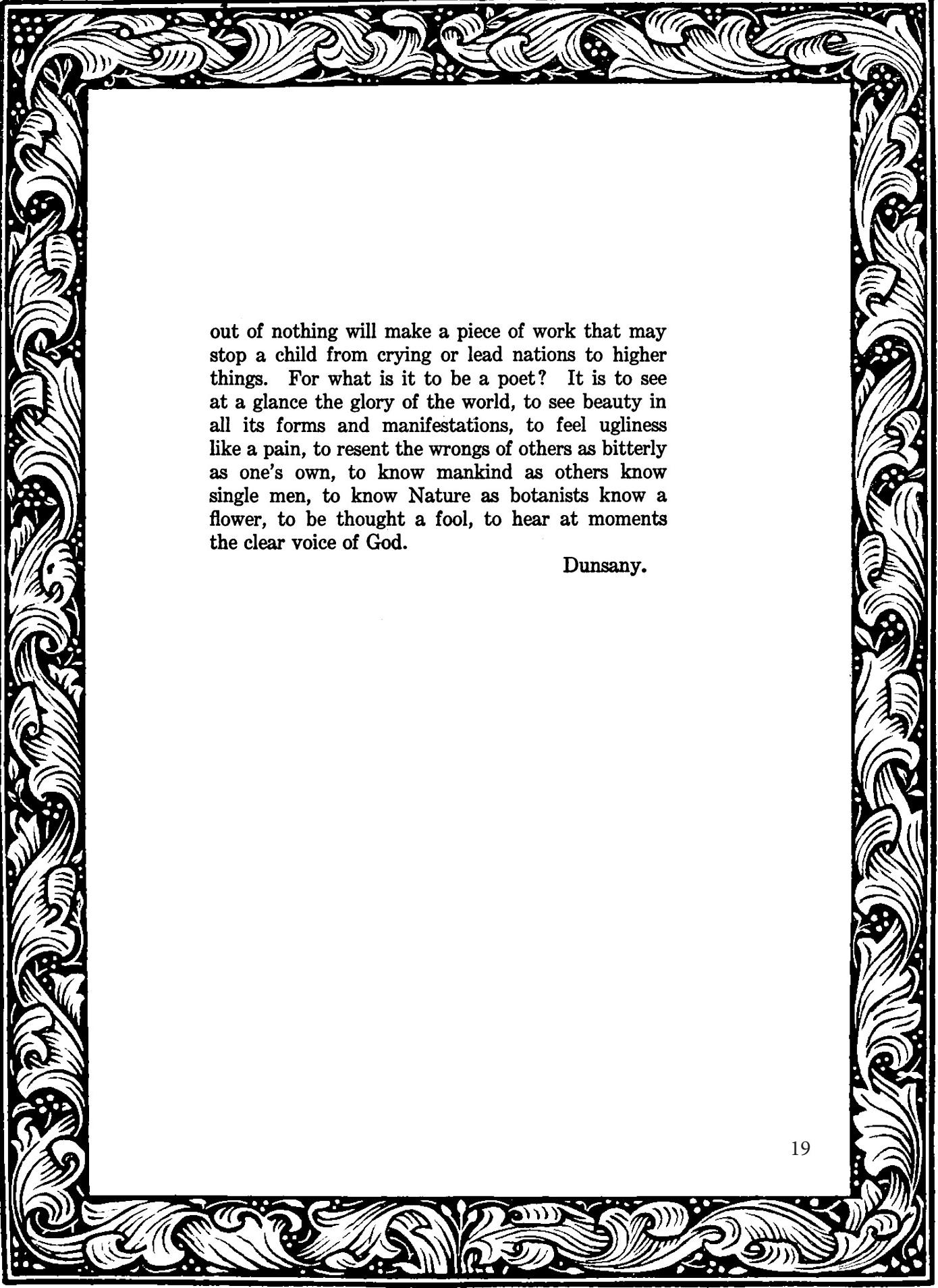
The soul is not soothed by a hundred miles an hour, the mind is not made easy in shops in Bond

Street by four hundred and five hundred per cent. profits, nor yet may happiness be found for certain even by all the wickedness of honoured and wealthy vendors of patent drugs and adulterated food. With such men as these last, money will always remain; but more and more every year I hope we may find men turning away towards simplicity and beauty, realising that though money *may* buy happiness, yet it is only a medium, while the poets have on sale in exchange for nothing those ideals, fancies, and phantasies out of which happiness is made. For not a penny is earned, not a thing done but it was to help to carry out some man's ambition to make some little fancy a little easier; and men's ambitions and men's fancies are the poet's raw material, and it is only short-sighted, unpractical millionaires that think that the stamped gold coins which they give their days in exchange for are at all an end in themselves, or that fail to see that that very happiness that they hope their money may buy is often thrown away for the sake of making that money. O all ye business men, praise ye money, for I sometimes think it is all you ever get. It may be that before we grow simpler and sincerer we may grow even worse. A substitute is yet to be found for water, as there has been for beer and salt; it is yet to be widely advertised, sold, and drunk like many another wickedness, but people must some day turn from all these things and go one by one to the camp where the good men



dwell — not the poets only, but all who do work for its own sake and do it well. There are two great divisions among them, the true and the sham ; I judge them by their works. In one class are all the snobs, all the pretenders, the writers of advertisements, the keepers of shops (except such as are honest), the makers of antique furniture and the buyers of it, the manufacturers of all things that are meant to look what they are not, the lovers of ugliness, not all the sinners, but all that sin meanly for the sake of gain, however honoured their stations. And in the other class are the men with spades, men near to the fields and natural like the harvests, soldiers and sailors, patriots, not politicians, common labourers, not labour-leaders, policemen, kings, and all (though happily the list is too long) who do any work well for the sake of the work, and not so as to sell it at an unjust price to the first ignorant customer. In this class are the poets. And this whole class should hold fast together to resist the false that is spreading over the world — false knowledge, false work, false food. The rough seafaring man may be ignorant of the poet, but they have the bond between them of work well done, which sets them utterly apart from the mean makers of cough-cures, and Cabinet Ministers answering in the affirmative.

And of such a class the poets should be the leaders ; for of all materials for labour, dreams are the hardest, and the artificer in ideas is the chief of workers, who



out of nothing will make a piece of work that may stop a child from crying or lead nations to higher things. For what is it to be a poet? It is to see at a glance the glory of the world, to see beauty in all its forms and manifestations, to feel ugliness like a pain, to resent the wrongs of others as bitterly as one's own, to know mankind as others know single men, to know Nature as botanists know a flower, to be thought a fool, to hear at moments the clear voice of God.

Dunsany.

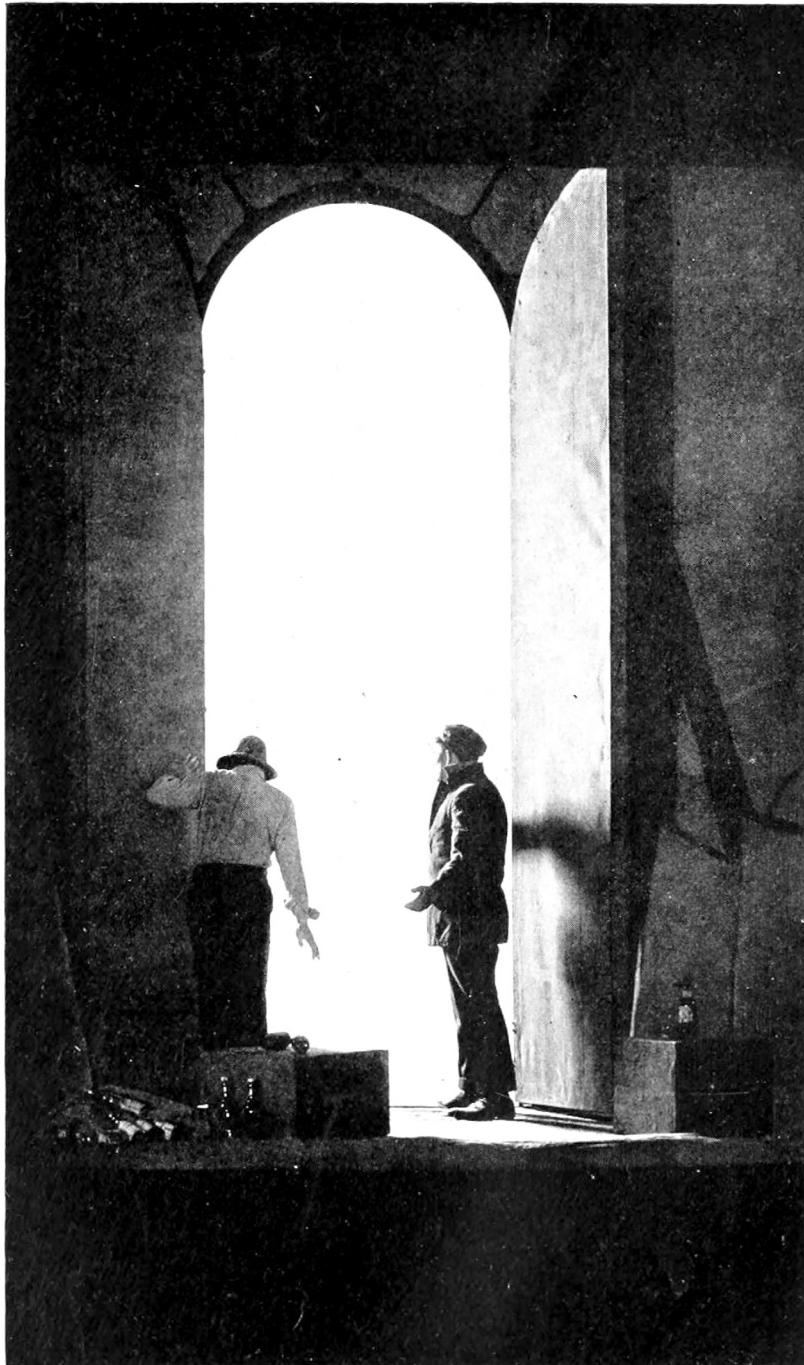


Photo by White Studio. Courtesy of Neighborhood Playhouse

THE GLITTERING GATE

The gate opens -- and there is nothing there

THE GLITTERING GATE

First produced on April 29th, 1909, at
the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Ireland.
The play was directed by Norryes
Connell, who also played Bill. First
published in Dunsany's *Five Plays*,
1911.

PERSONS

JIM, *lately a burglar* }
BILL, " " " } Both dead

Scene: A Lonely Place.

Time: The present.

THE GLITTERING GATE

The Lonely Place is strewn with large black rocks and uncorked beer-bottles, the latter in great profusion. At back is a wall of granite built of great slabs, and in it the Gate of Heaven. The door is of gold.

Below the Lonely Place is an abyss hung with stars.

The rising curtain reveals Jim wearily uncorking a beer-bottle. Then he tilts it slowly and with infinite care. It proves to be empty. Faint and unpleasant laughter is heard off. This action and the accompanying far laughter are repeated continually throughout the play. Corked bottles are discovered lying behind rocks, and more descend constantly through the air, within reach of Jim. All prove to be empty.

Jim uncorks a few bottles.

JIM (*weighing one carefully*)

That's a full one. (*It is empty, like all*)

[*Singing is heard off left.*

BILL (*enters from left with a bullet-hole over his eye, singing*) Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves.
(*Breaking off his song*) Why, 'ullo. 'Ere's a bottle of beer. (*Finds it empty; looking off and downward*) I'm getting a bit tired of those blooming great stars down there and this rocky ledge. I've been walking along under this wall ever since. Why, it must be twenty-four hours since that householder shot me. And he need n't have done it,

THE GLITTERING GATE

either, *I* was n't going to hurt the bloke. I only wanted a bit of his silver stuff. It felt funny, that did. Hullo, a gate. Why, that's the Gate of Heaven. Well, well. So that's all right. (*Looks up and up for some time*) No. I can't climb *that* wall. Why, it's got no top to it. Up and up it goes. (*Knocks at the door and waits*)

JIM

That is n't for the likes of us.

BILL

Why, hullo, there's another bloke. Why, somebody's been hanging him. Why, if it is n't old Jim! Jim!

JIM (*wearily*)

Hullo.

BILL

Why, Jim! 'Ow long 'ave you been 'ere?

JIM

I am 'ere always.

BILL

Why, Jim, don't you remember me? Why, you taught Bill to pick locks years and years ago when he was a little boy, and had never learnt a trade and had n't a penny in the world, and never would have had but for you, Jim. (*Jim stares vaguely*) I never forgot *you*, Jim. I broke into scores of houses. And then I took on big houses. Out in the country, you know, real big ones. I got rich, Jim, and respected by all who knew me. I was a citizen, Jim, one who dwelt in our midst. And of an evening, sitting over the fire, I used to say, "I am as clever as Jim." But I was n't, Jim. I could n't climb like you. And I could n't walk like you on

THE GLITTERING GATE

a creaky stair, when everything's quite still and there's a dog in the house and little ratty things left lying about, and a door that whines if you touch it, and someone ill upstairs that you did n't know of, who has nothing to do but to listen for *you* 'cause she can't get to sleep. Don't you remember little Bill?

JIM

That would be somewhere else.

BILL

Yes, Jim, yes. Down on Earth.

JIM

But there is n't anywhere else.

BILL

I never forgot *you*, Jim. I'd be pattering away with my tongue, in Church, like all the rest, but all the time I'd be thinking of you in that little room at Putney and the man searching every corner of it for you with a revolver in one hand and a candle in the other, and you almost going round with him.

JIM

What is Putney?

BILL

Oh, Jim, can't you remember? Can't you remember the day you taught me a livelihood? I was n't more than twelve, and it was spring, and all the may was in blossom outside the town. And we cleared out No. 25 in the new street. And next day we saw the man's fat, silly face. It was thirty years ago.

JIM

What are years?

BILL

Oh, *Jim!*

THE GLITTERING GATE

JIM

You see there is n't any hope here. And when there is n't any hope there is n't any future. And when there is n't any future there is n't any past. It's just the present here. I tell you we're stuck. There are n't no years here. Nor no nothing.

BILL

Cheer up, Jim. You're thinking of a quotation, "Abandon hope, all ye that enter here." I used to learn quotations; they are awfully genteel. A fellow called Shakespeare used to make them. But there is n't any sense in them. What's the use of saying *ye* when you mean *you*? Don't be thinking of quotations, Jim.

JIM

I tell you there is no hope here.

BILL

Cheer up, Jim. There's plenty of hope there, is n't there? (*Points to the Gate of Heaven*)

JIM

Yes, and that's why they keep it locked up so. They won't let us have any. No. I begin to remember Earth again now since you've been speaking. It was just the same there. The more they'd got the more they wanted to keep *you* from having a bit.

BILL

You'll cheer up a bit when I tell you what I've got. I say, Jim, have you got some beer? Why, so you have. Why, *you* ought to cheer up, Jim.

JIM

All the beer you're ever likely to see again. They're empty.

THE GLITTERING GATE

BILL (*half rising from the rock on which he has seated himself, and pointing his finger at Jim as he rises; very cheerfully*) Why, you're the chap that said there was no hope here, and you're hoping to find beer in every bottle you open.

JIM

Yes; I *hope* to see a drop of beer in one some day, but I *know* I won't. Their trick *might* not work just once.

BILL

How many have you tried, Jim?

JIM

Oh, I don't know. I've always been at it, working as fast as I can, ever since — ever since — (*Feels his neck meditatively and up toward his ear*) Why, ever since, Bill.

BILL

Why don't you stop it?

JIM

I'm too thirsty, Bill.

BILL

What do you think I've got, Jim?

JIM

I don't know. Nothing's any use.

BILL (*as yet another bottle is shown to be empty*)

Who's that laughing, Jim?

JIM (*astonished at such a question, loudly and emphatically*) Who's that laughing?

BILL (*looks a little disconcerted at having apparently asked a silly question*) Is it a pal?

JIM

A pal! — (*laughs*) (*The laugh off joins in loudly and for long*)

THE GLITTERING GATE

BILL

Well, I don't know. But, Jim, what do you think I've got?

JIM

It is n't any good to you whatever it is. Not even if it is a ten-pound note.

BILL

It's better than a ten-pound note, Jim. Jim, try and remember, Jim. Don't you remember the way we used to go for those iron safes? Do you remember anything, Jim?

JIM

Yes, I am beginning to remember now. There used to be sunsets. And then there were great yellow lights. And one went in behind them through a swinging door.

BILL

Yes, yes, Jim. That was the Blue Bear down at Wimbledon.

JIM

Yes, and the room was all full of golden light. And there was beer with light in it, and some would be spilt on the counter and there was light in that too. And there was a girl standing there with yellow hair. She'd be the other side of that door now, with lamplight in her hair among the angels, and the old smile on her lips if one of them chaffed her, and her pretty teeth a-shining. She would be very near the throne; there was never any harm in Jane.

BILL

No, there was never any 'arm in Jane, Jim.

JIM

Oh, I don't want to see the angels, Bill. But if I

THE GLITTERING GATE

could see Jane again (*points in direction of laugh*)
he might laugh as much as he cared to whenever I
wanted to cry. You can't cry here, you know, Bill.

BILL

You shall see her again, Jim.

[*Jim takes no interest in this remark; he lowers his eyes and goes on with his work.*

BILL

Jim, you shall see her again. You want to get into
Heaven, don't you?

JIM (*not raising his eyes*)

Want!

BILL

Jim. Do you know what I've got, Jim?

[*Jim makes no answer, goes on wearily with his work.*

BILL

You remember those iron safes, Jim, how we used
to knock them open like walnuts with "Old Nut-
cracker"?

JIM (*at work, wearily*)

Empty again.

BILL

Well, I've got Old Nut-cracker. I had him in my
hand at the time, and they let me keep him. They
thought it would be a nice proof against me.

JIM

Nothing is any good here.

BILL

I'll get in to Heaven, Jim. And you shall come
with me because you taught me a livelihood. I
could n't be happy there, like those angels, if I

THE GLITTERING GATE

knew of anyone being outside. I'm not like that.
[Jim goes on with his work.

BILL

Jim, Jim. You'll see Jane there.

JIM

You'll never get through those gates, Bill. You'll never do it.

BILL

They're only gold, Jim. Gold's soft like lead. Old Nut-cracker would do it if they were steel.

JIM

You'll never do it, Bill.

[Bill puts a rock against the gates, stands on it to reach the lock and gets to work on the lock. A good instrument to use is an egg-whipper. Jim goes on wearily with his work. As Bill works away, fragments and golden screws begin to fall on the floor.

BILL

Jim! Old Nut-cracker thinks nothing of it. It's just like cheese to old Nut-cracker.

JIM

They won't let you do it, Bill.

BILL

They don't know what I've got. I'm getting through it like cheese, Jim.

JIM

Suppose it's a mile thick. Suppose it's a million miles thick. Suppose it's a hundred million miles thick.

BILL

Can't be, Jim. These doors are meant to open outward. They could n't do that if they were more

THE GLITTERING GATE

than four inches at the most, not for an Archbishop.
They 'd stick.

JIM

You remember that great safe we broke open once,
what had coal in it.

BILL

This is n't a safe, Jim, this is Heaven. There 'll be the old saints with their halos shining and flickering, like windows o' wintry nights. (*Creak, creak, creak*) And angels thick as swallows along a cottage roof the day before they go. (*Creak, creak, creak*) And orchards full of apples as far as you can see, and the rivers of Tigris and Euphrates, so the Bible says; and a city of gold, for those that care for cities, all full of precious stones; but I 'm a bit tired of cities and precious stones. (*Creak, creak, creak*) I 'll go out into the fields where the orchards are, by the Tigris and the Euphrates. I should n't be surprised if my old mother was there. She never cared much for the way I earned my livelihood (*creak, creak*), but she was a good mother to me. I don't know if they want a good mother in there who would be kind to the angels and sit and smile at them when they sang and soothe them if they were cross. If they let all the good ones in she 'll be there all right. (*Suddenly*) Jim! They won't have brought me up against her, will they? That 's not fair evidence, Jim.

JIM

It would be just like them to. Very like them.

BILL

If there 's a glass of beer to be got in Heaven, or a dish of tripe and onions, or a pipe of 'bacca she 'll

THE GLITTERING GATE

have them for me when I come to her. She used to know my ways wonderful; and what I liked. And she used to know when to expect me almost anywhere. I used to climb in through the window at any hour and she always knew it was me. (*Creak, creak*) She'll know it's me at the door now, Jim. (*Creak, creak*) It will be all a blaze of light, and I'll hardly know it's her till I get used to it. . . . But I'll know her among a million angels. There were n't none like her on Earth and there won't be none like her in Heaven. . . . Jim! I'm through, Jim! One more turn, and old Nut-cracker's done it! It's giving! It's giving! I know the feel of it. *Jim!*

[*At last there is a noise of falling bolts; the gates swing out an inch and are stopped by the rock.*

BILL

Jim! Jim! I've opened it, Jim. I've opened the Gate of Heaven! Come and help me.

JIM (*looks up for a moment with open mouth. Then he mournfully shakes his head and goes on drawing a cork*) Another one empty.

BILL (*looks down once into the abyss that lies below the Lonely Place*) Stars. Blooming great stars.

[*Then he moves away the rock on which he stood. The gates move slowly. Jim leaps up and runs to help; they each take a gate and move backward with their faces against it.*

BILL

Hullo, mother! You there? Hullo! You there? It's Bill, mother.

[*The gates swing heavily open, revealing empty night and stars.*

THE GLITTERING GATE

BILL (*staggering and gazing into the revealed Nothing, in which far stars go wandering*) Stars. Blooming great stars. There ain't no Heaven, Jim.
[*Ever since the revelation a cruel and violent laugh has arisen off. It increases in volume and grows louder and louder.*

JIM

That's like them. That's very like them. Yes, they'd do that!

The curtain falls and the laughter still howls on.



Photo by J. M. Cummings. Courtesy of Portmanteau Theater

KING ARGIMENES AND THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR

Argimenes at last mounts the throne of Darniak

KING ARGIMENES AND THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR

First produced on January 26th, 1911, at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Ireland. The play was directed by Nugent Monck. First published in Dunsany's *Five Plays*, 1911.

PERSONS

KING ARGIMÈNES	}	<i>Slaves of King Darniak</i>
ZARB; <i>a slave born of slaves</i>		
AN OLD SLAVE		
A YOUNG SLAVE		
SLAVES		
KING DARNIAK	}	<i>Queens of King Darniak</i>
THE KING'S OVERSEER		
A PROPHET		
THE IDOL-GUARD		
THE SERVANT OF THE KING'S DOG		
QUEEN ATHARLIA		
QUEEN OXARA		
QUEEN CAHAFRA	}	<i>Queen Thragolind</i>
QUEEN THRAGOLIND		
GUARDS AND ATTENDANTS		

Time: A long time ago.

KING ARGIMENES AND THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR

THE FIRST ACT

The dinner-hour on the slave-fields of King Darniak. King Argimenes is sitting upon the ground, bowed, ragged and dirty, gnawing a bone. He has uncouth hair and a dishevelled beard. A battered spade lies near him. Two or three slaves sit at back of stage eating raw cabbage-leaves. The tear-song, the chant of the low-born, rises at intervals, monotonous and mournful, coming from distant slave-fields.

KING ARGIMENES

This is a good bone; there is juice in this bone.

ZARB

I wish I were you, Argimenes.

KING ARGIMENES

I am not to be envied any longer. I have eaten up my bone.

ZARB

I wish I were you, because you have been a king. Because men have prostrated themselves before your feet. Because you have ridden a horse and worn a crown and have been called Majesty.

KING ARGIMENES

When I remember that I have been a king it is very terrible.

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT I]

ZARB

But you are lucky to have such things in your memory as you have. I have nothing in my memory — Once I went for a year without being flogged, and I remember my cleverness in contriving it — I have nothing else to remember.

KING ARGIMENES

It is very terrible to have been a king.

ZARB

But we have nothing who have no good memories in the past. It is not easy for us to hope for the future here.

KING ARGIMENES

Have you any god?

ZARB

We may not have a god because he might make us brave and we might kill our guards. He might make a miracle and give us swords.

KING ARGIMENES

Ah, you have no hope, then.

ZARB

I have a little hope. Hush, and I will tell you a secret — The King's great dog is ill and like to die. They will throw him to us. We shall have beautiful bones then.

KING ARGIMENES

Ah! Bones.

ZARB

Yes. That is what *I* hope for. And have *you* no other hope? Do you not hope that your nation will arise some day and rescue you and cast off the king and hang him up by his thumbs from the palace gateway?

ACT I]

KING ARGIMENES

KING ARGIMENES

No. I have no other hope, for my god was cast down in the temple and broken into three pieces on the day that they surprised us and took me sleeping. But will they throw him to us? Will so honorable a brute as the King's dog be thrown to us?

ZARB

When he is dead his honors are taken away. Even the King when he is dead is given to the worms. Then why should not his dog be thrown to us?

KING ARGIMENES

We are not worms!

ZARB

You do not understand, Argimenes. The worms are little and free, while we are big and enslaved. I did not say we were worms, but we are *like* worms, and if they have the King when he is dead, why then —

KING ARGIMENES

Tell me more of the King's dog. Are there big bones on him?

ZARB

Ay, he is a big dog — a high, big, black one.

KING ARGIMENES

You know him then?

ZARB

Oh yes, I know him. I know him well. I was beaten once because of him, twenty-five strokes from the treble whips, two men beating me.

KING ARGIMENES

How did they beat you because of the King's dog?

ZARB

They beat me because I spoke to him without mak-

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT I]

ing obeisance. He was coming dancing along over the slave-fields and I spoke to him. He was a friendly great dog, and I spoke to him and patted his head, and did not make obeisance.

KING ARGIMENES

And they saw you do it?

ZARB

Yes, the slave-guard saw me. They came and seized me at once and bound my arms. The great dog wanted me to speak to him again, but I was hurried away.

KING ARGIMENES

You should have made obeisance.

ZARB

The great dog seemed so friendly that I forgot he was the King's great dog.

KING ARGIMENES

But tell me more. Was he hurt or is it a sickness?

ZARB

They say that it is a sickness.

KING ARGIMENES

Ah, then he will grow thin if he does not die soon. If it had been a hurt! — but we should not complain. I complain more often than you do because I had not learned to submit while I was yet young.

ZARB

If your beautiful memories do not please you, you should hope more. I wish I had your memories. I should not trouble to hope then. It is very hard to hope.

KING ARGIMENES

There will be nothing more to hope for when we have eaten the King's dog.

ACT I]

KING ARGIMENES

ZARB

Why, you might find gold in the earth while you were digging. Then you might bribe the commander of the guard to lend you his sword; we would all follow you if you had a sword. Then we might take the King and bind him and lay him on the ground and fasten his tongue outside his mouth with thorns and put honey on it and sprinkle honey near. Then the gray ants would come from one of their big mounds. My father found gold once when he was digging.

KING ARGIMENES (*pointedly*)

Did your father free himself?

ZARB

No. Because the King's Overseer found him looking at the gold and killed him. But he would have freed himself if he could have bribed the guard.

[*A Prophet walks across the stage attended by two guards.*

SLAVES

He is going to the King. He is going to the King.

ZARB

He is going to the King.

KING ARGIMENES

Going to prophesy good things to the King. It is easy to prophesy good things to a king, and be rewarded when the good things come. What else should come to a king? A prophet! A prophet!

[*A deep bell tolls slowly. King Argimenes and Zarb pick up their spades at once, and the old slaves at the back of the stage go down on their knees immediately and grub in the soil with their hands. The*

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT I]

white beard of the oldest trails in the dirt as he works. King Argimenes digs.

KING ARGIMENES

What is the name of that song that we always sing?
I like the song.

ZARB

It has no name. It is our song. There is no other song.

KING ARGIMENES

Once there were other songs. Has this no name?

ZARB

I think the soldiers have a name for it.

KING ARGIMENES

What do the soldiers call it?

ZARB

The soldiers call it the tear-song, the chant of the low-born.

KING ARGIMENES

It is a good song. I could sing no other now.

[Zarb moves away digging.

KING ARGIMENES (*to himself as his spade touches something in the earth*) Metal! (*Feels with his spade again*) Gold perhaps! — It is of no use here. (*Uncovers earth leisurely. Suddenly he drops on his knees and works excitedly in the earth with his hands. Then very slowly, still kneeling, he lifts, lying flat on his hands, a long greenish sword, his eyes intent on it. About the level of his uplifted forehead he holds it, still flat on both hands, and addresses it thus*) O holy and blessed thing! (*Then he lowers it slowly till his hands rest on his knees, and looking all the while at the sword, loquitur*) Three years ago to-morrow King Darniak spat at

ACT I]

KING ARGIMENES

me, having taken my kingdom from me. Three times in that year I was flogged, with twelve stripes, with seventeen stripes, and with twenty stripes. A year and eleven months ago, come Moon-day, the King's Overseer struck me in the face, and nine times in that year he called me dog. For one month two weeks and a day I was yoked with a bullock and pulled a rounded stone all day over the paths, except while we were fed. I was flogged twice that year — with eighteen stripes and with ten stripes. This year the roof of the slave-sty has fallen in and King Darniak will not repair it. Five weeks ago one of his Queens laughed at me as she came across the slave-fields. I was flogged again this year and with thirteen stripes, and twelve times they have called me dog. And these things they have done to a king, and a king of the House of Ithara. (*He listens attentively for a moment, then buries the sword again and pats the earth over it with his hands, then digs again*)

[*The old slaves do not see him: their faces are to the earth. Enter the King's Overseer carrying a whip. The slaves and King Argimenes kneel with their foreheads to the ground as he passes across the stage. Exit the King's Overseer.*

KING ARGIMENES (*kneeling, hands outspread downward*)

O warrior spirit, wherever thou wanderest, whoever be thy gods, whether they punish thee or whether they bless thee, O kingly spirit, that once laid here this sword, behold, I pray to thee, having no gods to pray to, for the god of my nation was broken in three by night. Mine arm is stiff with three years' slavery, and remembers not the sword. But guide

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT I]

thy sword till I have slain six men and armed the strongest slaves, and thou shalt have the sacrifice every year of a hundred goodly oxen. And I will build in Ithara a temple to thy memory wherein all that enter in shall remember thee; so shalt thou be honored and envied among the dead, for the dead are very jealous of remembrance. Ay, though thou wert a robber that took men's lives unrighteously, yet shall rare spices smoulder in thy temple and little maidens sing and new-plucked flowers deck the solemn aisles; and priests shall go about it ringing bells that thy soul shall find repose. Oh, but it has a good blade, this old green sword; thou wouldst not like to see it miss its mark (if the dead see at all, as wise men teach), thou wouldst not like to see it go thirsting into the air; so huge a sword should find its marrowy bone. (*Extending his right hand upward*) Come into my right arm, O ancient spirit, O unknown warrior's soul! And if thou hast the ear of any gods, speak there against Illuriel, god of King Darniak. (*He rises and goes on digging*)

THE KING'S OVERSEER (*re-entering*)

So you have been praying.

KING ARGIMENES (*kneeling*)

No, master.

THE KING'S OVERSEER

The slave-guard saw you. (*Strikes him*) It is not lawful for a slave to pray.

KING ARGIMENES

I did but pray to Illuriel to make me a good slave, to teach me to dig well and to pull the rounded stone and to make me not to die when the food is scarce, but to be a good slave to my master the great King.

ACT I]

KING ARGIMENES

THE KING'S OVERSEER

Who art thou to pray to Illuriel? Dogs may not
pray to an immortal god. (*Exit*)

[*Zarb comes back, digging.*

KING ARGIMENES (*digging*)

Zarb!

ZARB (*also digging*)

Do not look at me when you speak. The guards are
watching us. Look at your digging.

KING ARGIMENES

How do the guards know we are speaking because
we look at one another?

ZARB

You are very witless. Of course they know.

KING ARGIMENES

Zarb!

ZARB

What is it?

KING ARGIMENES

How many guards are there in sight?

ZARB

There are six of them over there. They are watch-
ing us.

KING ARGIMENES

Are there other guards in sight of these six guards?

ZARB

No.

KING ARGIMENES

How do you know?

ZARB

Because whenever their officer leaves them they sit
upon the ground and play with dice.

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT I]

KING ARGIMENES

How does that show that there are not another six
in sight of them?

ZARB

How witless you are, Argimenes! Of course it shows
there are not. Because, if there were, another of-
ficer would see them, and their thumbs would be
cut off.

KING ARGIMENES

Ah! (*A pause*) Zarb! (*A pause*) Would the
slaves follow me if I tried to kill the guards?

ZARB

No, Argimenes.

KING ARGIMENES

Why would they not follow me?

ZARB

Because you look like a slave. They will never
follow a slave, because they are slaves themselves,
and know how mean a creature is a slave. If you
looked like a king they would follow you.

KING ARGIMENES

But I am a king. They know that I am a king.

ZARB

It is better to look like a king. It is looks that
they would go by.

KING ARGIMENES

If I had a sword would they follow me? A beautiful
huge sword of bronze.

ZARB

I wish I could think of things like that. It is
because you were once a king that you can think
of a sword of bronze. I tried to hope once that I
should some day fight the guards, but I could n't

ACT I]

KING ARGIMENES

picture a sword, I could n't imagine it; I could only picture whips.

KING ARGIMENES

Dig a little nearer, Zarb. (*They both edge closer*) I have found a very old sword in the earth. It is not a sword such as common soldiers wear. A king must have worn it, and an angry king. It must have done fearful things; there are little dints in it. Perhaps there was a battle here long ago where all were slain, and perhaps that king died last and buried his sword, but the great birds swallowed him.

ZARB

You have been thinking too much of the King's dog, Argimenes, and that has made you hungry, and hunger has driven you mad.

KING ARGIMENES

I have found such a sword.

[*A pause.*

ZARB

Why — then you will wear a purple cloak again, and sit on a great throne, and ride a prancing horse, and we shall call you Majesty.

KING ARGIMENES

I shall break a long fast first and drink much water, and sleep. But will the slaves follow me?

ZARB

You will *make* them follow you if you have a sword. Yet is Illuriel a very potent god. They say that none have prevailed against King Darniak's dynasty so long as Illuriel stood. Once an enemy cast Illuriel into the river and overthrew the dynasty, but a fisherman found him again and set him up, and the enemy was driven out and the dynasty returned.

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT I]

KING ARGIMENES

If Illuriel could be cast down as my god was cast down perhaps King Darniak could be overcome as I was overcome in my sleep?

ZARB

If Illuriel were cast down all the people would utter a cry and flee away. It would be a fearful portent.

KING ARGIMENES

How many men are there in the armory at the palace?

ZARB

There are ten men in the palace armory when all the slave-guards are out.

[*They dig awhile in silence.*

ZARB

The officer of the slave-guard has gone away— They are playing with dice now. (*He throws down his spade and stretches his arms*) The man with the big beard has won again, he is very nimble with his thumbs— They are playing again, but it is getting dark, I cannot clearly see.

[*King Argimenes furtively uncovers the sword, he picks it up and grips it in his hand.*

ZARB

Majesty!

[*King Argimenes crouches and steals away towards the slave-guard.*

.

ZARB (*to the other slaves*)

Argimenes has found a terrible sword and has gone to slay the slave-guard. It is not a common sword, it is some king's sword.

ACT I] KING ARGIMENES

AN OLD SLAVE

Argimenes will be dreadfully flogged. We shall hear him cry all night. His cries will frighten us, and we shall not sleep.

ZARB

No, no! The guards flog poor slaves, but Argimenes had an angry look. The guards will be afraid when they see him look so angry and see his terrible sword. It was a huge sword, and he looked very angry. He will bring us the swords of the slave-guard. We must prostrate ourselves before him and kiss his feet or he will be angry with us too.

OLD SLAVE

Will Argimenes give me a sword?

ZARB

He will have swords for six of us if he slays the slave-guard. Yes, he will give you a sword.

SLAVE

A sword! No, no, I must not; the King would kill me if he found that I had a sword.

SECOND SLAVE (*slowly, as one who develops an idea*)

If the King found that I had a sword, why, then it would be an evil day for the King.

[*They all look off left.*

ZARB

I think that they are playing at dice again.

FIRST SLAVE

I do not see Argimenes.

ZARB

No, because he was crouching as he walked. The slave-guard is on the sky-line.

SECOND SLAVE

What is that dark shadow behind the slave-guard?

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT I]

ZARB

It is too still to be Argimenes.

SECOND SLAVE

Look! It moves.

ZARB

The evening is too dark, I cannot see.

[They continue to gaze into the gathering darkness. They raise themselves on their knees and crane their necks. Nobody speaks. Then from their lips and from others farther off goes up a long, deep "Oh!" It is like the sound that goes up from the grandstand when a horse falls at a fence, or, in England, like the first exclamation of the crowd at a great cricket match when a man is caught in the slips.]

CURTAIN

THE SECOND ACT

The Throne Hall of King Darniak. The King is seated on his throne in the centre at the back of the stage; a little to his left, but standing out from the wall, a dark-green seated idol is set up. His Queens are seated about him on the ground, two on his right and two between him and the idol. All wear crowns. Beside the dark-green idol a soldier with a pike is kneeling upon one knee. The tear-song, the chant of the low-born, drifts faintly up from the slave-fields.

FIRST QUEEN

Do show us the new prophet, Majesty; it would be very interesting to see another prophet.

THE KING

Ah, yes.

[*He strikes upon a gong, and an Attendant enters, walks straight past the King and bows before the idol; he then walks back to the centre of the stage and bows before the King.*

THE KING

Bring the new prophet hither.

[*Exit Attendant. Enter the King's Overseer holding a roll of paper. He passes the King, bows to the idol, returns to the front of the King, kneels, and remains kneeling with bended head.*

THE KING (*speaking in the meanwhile to the Second Queen on his immediate right*) We are making a beautiful arbor for you, O Atharlia, at an end of

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT II]

the great garden. There shall be iris-flowers that you love and all things that grow by streams. And the stream there shall be small and winding like one of those in your country. I shall bring a stream a new way from the mountains. (*Turning to Queen Oxara on his extreme right*) And for you, too, O Oxara, we shall make a pleasure. I shall have rocks brought from the quarries for you, and my idle slaves shall make a hill and plant it with mountain shrubs, and you can sit there in the winter thinking of the North. (*To the kneeling Overseer*) Ah, what is here?

THE KING'S OVERSEER

The plans of your royal garden, Majesty. The slaves have dug it for five years and rolled the paths.

THE KING (*takes the plans*)

Was there not a garden in Babylon?

THE KING'S OVERSEER

They say there was a garden there of some sort, Majesty.

THE KING

I will have a greater garden. Let the world know and wonder. (*Looks at the plans*)

THE KING'S OVERSEER

It shall know at once, Majesty.

THE KING (*pointing at the plan*)

I do not like that hill, it is too steep.

THE KING'S OVERSEER

No, Majesty.

THE KING

Remove it.

ACT II]

KING ARGIMENES

THE KING'S OVERSEER

Yes, Majesty.

THE KING

When will the garden be ready for the Queens to walk in?

THE KING'S OVERSEER

Work is slow, Majesty, at this season of the year because the green stuff is scarce and the slaves grow idle. They even become insolent and ask for bones.

QUEEN CAHAFRA (*to the King's Overseer*)

Then *why* are they not flogged? (*To Queen Thragolind*) It is so simple, they *only* have to flog them, but these people are so silly sometimes. I want to walk in the great garden, and then they tell me: "It is not ready, Majesty. It is not ready, Majesty," as though there were any reason why it should *not* be ready.

FOURTH QUEEN

Yes, they are a great trouble to us.

[Meanwhile the King hands back the plans. Exit the King's Overseer. Re-enter Attendant with the Prophet, who is dressed in a long dark brown cloak; his face is solemn; he has a long dark beard and long hair. Having bowed before the idol, he bows before the King and stands silent. The attendant, having bowed to both, stands by the doorway.

THE KING (*meanwhile to Queen Atharlia*)

Perhaps we shall lure the ducks when the marshes are frozen to come and swim in your stream; it will be like your own country. (*To the Prophet*) Prophesy unto us.

THE PROPHET (*speaks at once in a loud voice*)

There was once a King that had slaves to hate him

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT II]

and to toil for him, and he had soldiers to guard him and to die for him. And the number of the slaves that he had to hate him and to toil for him was greater than the number of the soldiers that he had to guard him and to die for him. And the days of that King were few. And the number of thy slaves, O King, that thou hast to hate thee is greater than the number of thy soldiers.

QUEEN CAHAFRA (*to Queen Thragolind*)

— and I wore the crown with the sapphires and the big emerald in it, and the foreign prince said that I looked very sweet.

[*The King, who has been smiling at Atharlia, gives a gracious nod to the Prophet when he hears him stop speaking. When the Queens see the King nod graciously, they applaud the Prophet by idly clapping their hands.*

THIRD QUEEN

Do ask him to make us another prophecy, Majesty!
He is so interesting. He looks so clever.

THE KING

Prophecy unto us.

THE PROPHET

Thine armies camped upon thy mountainous borders
descry no enemy in the plains afar. And within thy
gates lurks he for whom thy sentinels seek upon
lonely guarded frontiers. There is a fear upon me
and a boding. Even yet there is time, even yet;
but *little* time. And my mind is dark with trouble
for thy kingdom.

QUEEN CAHAFRA (*to Queen Thragolind*)

I do not like the way he does his hair.

ACT II]

KING ARGIMENES

QUEEN THRAGOLIND

It would be all right if he would only have it cut.

THE KING (*to the Prophet, dismissing him with a nod of the head*) Thank you, that has been very interesting.

QUEEN THRAGOLIND

How clever he is! I wonder how he thinks of things like that?

QUEEN CAHAFRA

Yes, but I hate a man who is conceited about it. Look how he wears his hair.

QUEEN THRAGOLIND

Yes, of course, it is perfectly dreadful.

QUEEN CAHAFRA

Why can't he wear his hair like other people, even if he does say clever things?

QUEEN THRAGOLIND

Yes, I hate a conceited man.¹

[Enter an Attendant. *He bows before the idol, then kneels to the King.*

THE ATTENDANT

The guests are all assembled in the Chamber of Banquets.

[All rise. *The Queens walk two abreast to the Chamber of Banquets.*

QUEEN ATHARLLA (*to Queen Oxara*)

What was he talking about?

QUEEN OXARA

He was talking about the armies on the frontier.

¹ It is not necessary for the prophet's hair to be at all unusual.

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT II]

QUEEN ATHARLIA

Ah! That reminds me of that young captain in the Purple Guard. They say that he loves Linoora.

QUEEN OXARA

Oh, Thearkos! Linoora probably said that.

[*When the Queens come to the doorway they halt on each side of it. Then they turn facing one another. Then the King leaves his throne and passes between them into the Chamber of Banquets, each couple courtseying low to him as he passes. The Queens follow, then the attendants. There rises the wine-song, the chant of the nobles, drowning the chant of the low-born. Only the Idol-Guard remains behind, still kneeling beside Illuriel.*

THE IDOL-GUARD

I do not like those things the Prophet said — It would be terrible if they were true — It would be very terrible if they were false, for he prophesies in the name of Illuriel — Ah! They are singing the wine-song, the chant of the nobles. The Queens are singing. How merry they are! — I should like to be a noble and sit and look at the Queens.

(He joins in the song)

THE VOICE OF A SENTINEL

Guard, turn out. (*The wine-song still continues*)

THE VOICE OF ONE HAVING AUTHORITY

Turn out the guard there! Wake up, you accursed pigs!

[*Still the wine-song. A faint sound as of swords.*

A VOICE CRYING

To the armory! To the armory! Reinforce! The Slaves have come to the armory. Ah! mercy! (*For awhile there is silence*)

ACT II]

KING ARGIMENES

KING ARGIMENES (*in the doorway*)

Go you to the slave-fields. Say that the palace-guard is dead and that we have taken the armory. Ten of you, hold the armory till our men come from the slave-fields. (*He comes into the hall with his slaves armed with swords*) Throw down Illuriel.

THE IDOL-GUARD

You must take my life before you touch my god.

A SLAVE

We only want your pike.

[*All attack him; they seize his sword and bind his hands behind him. They all pull down Illuriel, the dark-green idol, who breaks into seven pieces.*

KING ARGIMENES

Illuriel is fallen and broken asunder.

ZARB (*with some awe*)

Immortal Illuriel is dead at last.

KING ARGIMENES

My god was broken into three pieces, but Illuriel is broken into seven. The fortunes of Darniak will prevail over mine no longer. (*A slave breaks off a golden arm from the throne*) Come, we will arm all the slaves. (*Exeunt*)

KING DARNIAK (*enters with Retinue*)

My throne is broken. Illuriel is turned against me.

AN ATTENDANT

Illuriel is fallen.

ALL (*with King Darniak*)

Illuriel is fallen, is fallen. (*Some drop their spears*)

KING DARNIAK (*to the Idol-Guard*)

What envious god or sacrilegious man has dared to do this thing?

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT II]

THE IDOL-GUARD

Illuriel is fallen.

KING DARNIAK

Have men been here?

THE IDOL-GUARD

Is fallen.

KING DARNIAK

What way did they go?

THE IDOL-GUARD

Illuriel is fallen.

KING DARNIAK

They shall be tortured here before Illuriel, and their eyes shall be hung on a thread about his neck, so that Illuriel shall see it, and on their bones we will set him up again. Come!

[Those that have dropped their spears pick them up, but trail them along behind them on the ground. All follow dejectedly.]

VOICES OF LAMENTATION (*growing fainter and fainter off*) Illuriel is fallen, Illuriel is fallen. Illuriel, Illuriel, Illuriel. Is fallen. Is fallen. (*The song of the low-born ceases suddenly. Then voices of the slaves in the slave-fields chanting very loudly*) Illuriel is fallen, is fallen, is fallen. Illuriel is fallen and broken asunder. Illuriel is fallen, fallen, fallen.

[Clamor of fighting is heard, the clash of swords, and voices, and now and then the name of Illuriel.]

THE IDOL-GUARD (*kneeling over a fragment of Illuriel*) Illuriel is broken. They have overthrown Illuriel. They have done great harm to the courses of the stars. The moon will be turned to blackness or fall and forsake the nights. The sun will rise no more.

ACT II]

KING ARGIMENES

They do not know how they have wrecked the world.
[Re-enter King Argimenes and his men.]

KING ARGIMENES (*in the doorway*)

Go you to the land of Ithara and tell them that I am free. And do you go to the army on the frontier. Offer them death, or the right arm of the throne to be melted and divided amongst them all. Let them choose. (*The armed slaves go to the throne and stand on each side of it, loquitur*) Majesty, ascend your throne. (*King Argimenes, standing with his face toward the audience, lifts the sword slowly, lying on both his hands, a little above his head, then looking up at it, loquitur*) Praise to the unknown warrior and to all gods that bless him. (*He ascends the throne. Zarb prostrates himself at the foot of it and remains prostrated for the rest of the Act, muttering at intervals "Majesty."*) An armed slave enters dragging the King's Overseer. King Argimenes sternly watches him. He is dragged before the Throne. He still has the roll of parchment in his hand. For some moments King Argimenes does not speak. Then pointing at the parchment) What have you there?

THE KING'S OVERSEER (*kneeling*)

It is a plan of the great garden, Majesty. It was to have been a wonder to the world. (*Unfolds it*)

KING ARGIMENES (*grimly*)

Show me the place that I digged for three years. (*The King's Overseer shows it with trembling hands; the parchment shakes visibly*) Let there be built there a temple to an Unknown Warrior. And let this sword be laid on its altar evermore, that the ghost of that Warrior wandering by night (if men

KING ARGIMENES

[ACT II

do walk by night from across the grave) may see his sword again. And let slaves be allowed to pray there and those that are oppressed; nevertheless the noble and the mighty shall not fail to repair there too, that the Unknown Warrior shall not lack due reverence.

[Enter, running, a Man of the household of King Darniak. He starts and stares aghast on seeing King Argimenes.

KING ARGIMENES

Who are you?

MAN

I am the servant of the King's dog.

KING ARGIMENES

Why do you come here?

MAN

The King's dog is dead.

KING ARGIMENES AND HIS MEN (*savagely and hungrily*)

Bones!

KING ARGIMENES (*remembering suddenly what has happened and where he is*) Let him be buried with the late King.

ZARB (*in a voice of protest*)

Majesty!

CURTAIN



Photo by White Studio. Courtesy of Portmanteau Theater
THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN -
Agmar tells Slag to have a prophecy made

THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

First produced on June 1st, 1911, at the Haymarket Theatre in London, England. The scenery was designed by Walter Bayes and Sidney H Sime. First published in Dunsany's *Five Plays*, 1911.

PERSONS

AGMAR	Beggars
SLAG	
ULF	
OOGNO	
THAHN	
MLAN	
A THIEF	
OORANDER	Citizens
ILLANAUN	
AKMOS	
THE DROMEDARY MEN	
CITIZENS, ETC.	
THE OTHERS	

SCENE: THE EAST

THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

THE FIRST ACT

Outside a city wall. Three beggars are seated upon the ground.

OOGNO

These days are bad for beggary.

THAHN

They are bad.

ULF (*an older beggar but not gray*)

Some evil has befallen the rich ones of this city. They take no joy any longer in benevolence, but are become sour and miserly at heart. Alas for them! I sometimes sigh for them when I think of this.

OOGNO

Alas for them! A miserly heart must be a sore affliction.

THAHN

A sore affliction indeed, and bad for our calling.

OOGNO (*reflectively*)

They have been thus for many months. What thing has befallen them?

THAHN

Some evil thing.

ULF

There has been a comet come near to the earth of

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT I]

late and the earth has been parched and sultry so that the gods are drowsy and all those things that are divine in man, such as benevolence, drunkenness, extravagance, and song, have faded and died and have not been replenished by the gods.

OOGNO

It has indeed been sultry.

THAHN

I have seen the comet o' nights.

ULF

The gods are drowsy.

OOGNO

If they awake not soon and make this city worthy again of our order I for one shall forsake the calling and buy a shop and sit at ease in the shade and barter for gain.

THAHN

You will keep a shop?

[Enter Agmar and Slag. Agmar, though poorly dressed, is tall, imperious, and older than Ulf. Slag follows behind him.

AGMAR

Is this a beggar who speaks?

OOGNO

Yes, master, a poor beggar.

AGMAR

How long has the calling of beggary existed?

OOGNO

Since the building of the first city, master.

AGMAR

And when has a beggar ever followed a trade? When has he ever haggled and bartered and sat in a shop?

ACT I] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

OOGNO

Why, he has never done so.

AGMAR

Are you he that shall be first to forsake the calling?

OOGNO

Times are bad for the calling here.

THAHN

They are bad.

AGMAR

So you would forsake the calling?

OOGNO

The city is unworthy of our calling. The gods are drowsy and all that is divine in man is dead. (*To third beggar*) Are not the gods drowsy?

ULF

They are drowsy in their mountains away at Marma. The seven green idols are drowsy. Who is this that rebukes us?

THAHN

Are you some great merchant, master? Perhaps you will help a poor man that is starving.

SLAG

My master a merchant! No, no. He is no merchant. My master is no merchant.

OOGNO

I perceive that he is some lord in disguise. The gods have woken and have sent him to save us.

SLAG

No, no. You do not know my master. You do not know him.

THAHN

Is he the Soldan's self that has come to rebuke us?

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT I]

AGMAR

I am a beggar, and an old beggar.

SLAG (*with great pride*)

There is none like my master. No traveller has met with cunning like to his, not even those that come from *A*Ethiopia.

ULF

We make you welcome to our town, upon which an evil has fallen, the days being bad for beggary.

AGMAR

Let none who has known the mystery of roads or has felt the wind arising new in the morning, or who has called forth out of the souls of men divine benevolence, ever speak any more of any trade or of the miserable gains of shops and the trading men.

OOGNO

I but spoke hastily, the times being bad.

AGMAR

I will put right the times.

SLAG

There is nothing that my master cannot do.

AGMAR (*to Slag*)

Be silent and attend to me. I do not know this city. I have travelled from far, having somewhat exhausted the city of Ackara.

SLAG

My master was three times knocked down and injured by carriages there, once he was killed and seven times beaten and robbed, and every time he was generously compensated. He had nine diseases, many of them mortal —

ACT I] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

AGMAR

Be silent, Slag. — Have you any thieves among the calling here?

ULF

We have a few that we call thieves here, master, but they would scarcely seem thieves to you. They are not good thieves.

AGMAR

I shall need the best thief you have.

[Enter two citizens richly clad, Illanaun and Oorander.

ILLANAUN

Therefore we will send galleons to Ardaspes.

OORANDER

Right to Ardaspes through the silver gates.

[Agmar transfers the thick handle of his long staff to his left armpit, he droops on to it and it supports his weight; he is upright no longer. His right arm hangs limp and useless. He hobbles up to the citizens imploring alms.

ILLANAUN

I am sorry. I cannot help you. There have been too many beggars here and we must decline alms for the good of the town.

AGMAR (*sitting down and weeping*)

I have come from far.

[Illanaun presently returns and gives Agmar a coin. Exit Illanaun. Agmar, erect again, walks back to the others.

AGMAR

We shall need fine raiment; let the thief start at once. Let it rather be green raiment.

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT I]

BEGGAR

I will go and fetch the thief. (*Exit*)

ULF

We will dress ourselves as lords and impose upon the city.

OOGNO

Yes, yes; we will say we are ambassadors from a far land.

ULF

And there will be good eating.

SLAG (*in an undertone to Ulf*)

But you do not know my master. Now that you have suggested that we shall go as lords, he will make a better suggestion. He will suggest that we should go as kings.

ULF

Beggars as kings!

SLAG

Ay. You do not know my master.

ULF (*to Agmar*)

What do you bid us do?

AGMAR

You shall first come by the fine raiment in the manner I have mentioned.

ULF

And what then, master?

AGMAR

Why, then we shall go as gods.

BEGGARS

As gods!

AGMAR

As gods. Know you the land through which I have lately come in my wanderings? Marma, where the

ACT I] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

gods are carved from green stone in the mountains. They sit all seven of them against the hills. They sit there motionless and travellers worship them.

ULF

Yes, yes, we know those gods. They are much reverenced here, but they are drowsy and send us nothing beautiful.

AGMAR

They are of green jade. They sit cross-legged with their right elbows resting on their left hands, the right forefinger pointing upward. We will come into the city disguised, from the direction of Marma, and will claim to be these gods. We must be seven as they are. And when we sit we must sit cross-legged as they do, with the right hand uplifted.

ULF

This is a bad city in which to fall into the hands of oppressors, for the judges lack amiability here as the merchants lack benevolence, ever since the gods forgot them.

AGMAR

In our ancient calling a man may sit at one street corner for fifty years doing the one thing, and yet a day may come when it is well for him to rise up and do another thing while the timorous man starves.

ULF

Also it were well not to anger the gods.

AGMAR

Is not all life a beggary to the gods? Do they not see all men always begging of them and asking alms with incense, and bells, and subtle devices?

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT I]

OOGNO

Yes, all men indeed are beggars before the gods.

AGMAR

Does not the mighty Soldan often sit by the agate altar in his royal temple as we sit at a street corner or by a palace gate?

ULF

It is even so.

AGMAR

Then will the gods be glad when we follow the holy calling with new devices and with subtlety, as they are glad when the priests sing a new song.

ULF

Yet I have a fear.

[Enter two men talking.]

AGMAR (*to Slag*)

Go you into the city before us and let there be a prophecy there which saith that the gods who are carven from green rock in the mountain shall one day arise in Marma and come here in the guise of men.

SLAG

Yes, master. Shall I make the prophecy myself? Or shall it be found in some old document?

AGMAR

Let someone have seen it once in some rare document. Let it be spoken of in the market place.

SLAG

It shall be spoken of, master.

[*Slag lingers. Enter Thief and Thahn.*]

OOGNO

This is our thief.

ACT I] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

AGMAR (*encouragingly*)

Ah, he is a quick thief.

THIEF

I could only procure you three green raiments, master. The city is not now well supplied with them; moreover, it is a very suspicious city and without shame for the baseness of its suspicions.

SLAG (*to a beggar*)

This is not thieving.

THIEF

I could do no more, master. I have not practised thieving all my life.

AGMAR

You have got something: it may serve our purpose. How long have you been thieving?

THIEF

I stole first when I was ten.

SLAG (*in horror*)

When he was ten!

AGMAR

We must tear them up and divide them amongst the seven. (*To Thahn*) Bring me another beggar.

SLAG

When my master was ten he had already to slip by night out of two cities.

OOGNO (*admiringly*)

Out of two cities?

SLAG (*nodding his head*)

In his native city they do not now know what became of the golden cup that stood in the Lunar Temple.

AGMAR

Yes, into seven pieces.

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT I]

ULF

We will each wear a piece of it over our rags.

OOGNO

Yes, yes, we shall look fine.

AGMAR

That is not the way that we shall disguise ourselves.

OOGNO

Not cover our rags?

AGMAR

No, no. The first who looked closely would say,
"These are only beggars. They have disguised
themselves."

ULF

What shall we do?

AGMAR

Each of the seven shall wear a piece of the green
raiment underneath his rags. And peradventure
here and there a little shall show through; and
men shall say, "These seven have disguised them-
selves as beggars. But we know not what they be."

SLAG

Hear my wise master.

OOGNO (*in admiration*)

He is a beggar.

ULF

He is an *old* beggar.

CURTAIN

THE SECOND ACT

*The Metropolitan Hall of the city of Kongros.
Citizens, etc.*

*Enter the seven beggars with green silk under their
rags.*

OORANDER

Who are you and whence come you?

AGMAR

Who may say what we are or whence we come?

OORANDER

What are these beggars and why do they come here?

AGMAR

Who said to you that we were beggars?

OORANDER

Why do these men come here?

AGMAR

Who said to you that we were men?

ILLANAUN

Now, by the moon!

AGMAR

My sister.

ILLANAUN

What?

AGMAR

My little sister.

SLAG

Our little sister the moon. She comes to us at evenings away in the mountains of Marma. She

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT II

trips over the mountains when she is young. When she is young and slender she comes and dances before us, and when she is old and unshapely she hobbles away from the hills.

AGMAR

Yet is she young again and forever nimble with youth; yet she comes dancing back. The years are not able to curb her nor to bring gray hairs to her brethren.

OORANDER

This is not wonted.

ILLANAUN

It is not in accordance with custom.

AKMOS

Prophecy hath not thought it.

SLAG

She comes to us new and nimble, remembering olden loves.

OORANDER

It were well that prophets should come and speak to us.

ILLANAUN

This hath not been in the past. Let prophets come. Let prophets speak to us of future things.

[*The beggars seat themselves upon the floor in the attitude of the seven gods of Marma.*

CITIZEN

I heard men speak to-day in the market place. They speak of a prophecy read somewhere of old. It says the seven gods shall come from Marma in the guise of men.

ILLANAUN

Is this a true prophecy?

ACT II] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

OORANDER

It is all the prophecy we have. Man without prophecy is like a sailor going by night over uncharted seas. He knows not where are the rocks nor where the havens. To the man on watch all things ahead are black and the stars guide him not, for he knows not what they are.

ILLANAUN

Should we not investigate this prophecy?

OORANDER

Let us accept it. It is as the small, uncertain light of a lantern, carried it may be by a drunkard, but along the shore of some haven. Let us be guided.

AKMOS

It may be that they are but benevolent gods.

AGMAR

There is no benevolence greater than our benevolence.

ILLANAUN

Then we need do little: they portend no danger to us.

AGMAR

There is no anger greater than our anger.

OORANDER

Let us make sacrifice to them if they be gods.

AKMOS

We humbly worship you, if ye be gods.

ILLANAUN (*kneeling too*)

You are mightier than all men and hold high rank among other gods and are lords of this our city, and have the thunder as your plaything and the whirlwind and the eclipse and all the destinies of human tribes — if ye be gods.

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT II]

AGMAR

Let the pestilence not fall at once upon this city,
as it had indeed designed to; let not the earthquake
swallow it all immediately up amid the howls of
the thunder; let not infuriated armies overwhelm
those that escape—if we be gods—

POPULACE (*in horror*)

If we be gods!

OORANDER

Come, let us sacrifice.

ILLANAUN

Bring lambs.

AKMOS

Quick! Quick! (*Exeunt some*)

SLAG (*with solemn air*)

This god is a very divine god.

THAHN

He is no common god.

MLAN

Indeed he has made us.

CITIZEN (*to Slag*)

He will not punish us, master? None of the gods
will punish us? We will make a sacrifice, a good
sacrifice.

ANOTHER

We will sacrifice a lamb that the priests have
blessed.

FIRST CITIZEN

Master, you are not wroth with us?

SLAG

Who may say what cloudy dooms are rolling up
in the mind of the eldest of the gods? He is no
common god like us. Once a shepherd went by him

ACT II] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

in the mountains and doubted as he went. He sent
a doom after that shepherd.

CITIZEN

Master, we have not doubted.

SLAG

And the doom found him on the hills at evening.

SECOND CITIZEN

It shall be a good sacrifice, master.

[Re-enter with a dead lamb and fruits. They offer
the lamb on an altar where there is fire, and fruits
before the altar.

THAHN (stretching out a hand to a lamb upon an
altar) That leg is not being cooked at all.

ILLANAUN

It is strange that gods should be thus anxious about
the cooking of a leg of lamb.

OORANDER

It is strange certainly.

ILLANAUN

Almost I had said that it was a man spoke then.

OORANDER (stroking his beard and regarding the second
beggar) Strange. Strange, certainly.

AGMAR

Is it then strange that the gods love roasted flesh?
For this purpose they keep the lightning. When
the lightning flickers about the limbs of men there
comes to the gods in Marma a pleasant smell, even
a smell of roasting. Sometimes the gods, being
pacific, are pleased to have roasted instead the flesh
of lamb. It is all one to the gods; let the roasting
stop.

OORANDER

No, no, gods of the mountains!

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT II]

OTHERS

No, no.

OORANDER

Quick, let us offer the flesh to them. If they eat,
all is well.

[*They offer it; the beggars eat, all but Agmar,
who watches.*

ILLANAUN

One who was ignorant, one who did not know, had
almost said that they ate like hungry men.

OTHERS

Hush!

AKMOS

Yet they look as though they had not had a meal
like this for a long time.

OORANDER

They have a hungry look.

AGMAR (*who has not eaten*)

I have not eaten since the world was very new and
the flesh of men was tenderer than now. These
younger gods have learned the habit of eating from
the lions.

OORANDER

O oldest of divinities, partake, partake.

AGMAR

It is not fitting that such as I should eat. None
eat but beasts and men and the younger gods. The
sun and the moon and the nimble lightning and I—
we may kill and we may madden, but we do not
eat.

AKMOS

If he but eat of our offering he cannot overwhelm us.

ACT II] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

ALL

Oh, ancient deity, partake, partake.

AKMOS

Enough. Let it be enough that these have condescended to this bestial and human habit.

ILLANAUN (*to Akmos*)

And yet he is not unlike a beggar whom I saw not so long since.

OORANDER

But beggars eat.

ILLANAUN

Now I never knew a beggar yet who would refuse a bowl of Woldery wine.

AKMOS

This is no beggar.

ILLANAUN

Nevertheless let us offer him a bowl of Woldery wine.

AKMOS

You do wrong to doubt him.

ILLANAUN

I do but wish to prove his divinity. I will fetch the Woldery wine. (*Exit*)

AKMOS

He will not drink. Yet if he does, then he will not overwhelm us. Let us offer him the wine.

[*Re-enter Illanaun with a goblet.*

FIRST BEGGAR

It is Woldery wine!

SECOND BEGGAR

It is Woldery!

THIRD BEGGAR

A goblet of Woldery wine!

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT II]

FOURTH BEGGAR

O blessed day!

MLAN

O happy times!

SLAG

O my wise master!

[*Illanaun takes the goblet. All the beggars stretch out their hands including Agmar. Illanaun gives it to Agmar. Agmar takes it solemnly, and very carefully pours it upon the ground.*]

FIRST BEGGAR

He has spilt it.

SECOND BEGGAR

He has spilt it. (*Agmar sniffs the fumes, loquitur*)

AGMAR

It is a fitting libation. Our anger is somewhat appeased.

ANOTHER BEGGAR

But it was Woldery!

AKMOS (*kneeling to Agmar*)

Master, I am childless, and I —

AGMAR

Trouble us not now. It is the hour at which the gods are accustomed to speak to the gods in the language of the gods, and if Man heard us he would guess the futility of his destiny, which were not well for Man. Begone! Begone!

ONE LINGERS (*loquitur*)

Master —

AGMAR

Begone!

[*Exeunt. Agmar takes up a piece of meat and*

ACT II] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

begins to eat it; the beggars rise and stretch themselves: they laugh, but Agmar eats hungrily.

OOGNO

Ah! Now we have come into our own.

THAHN

Now we have alms.

SLAG

Master! My wise master!

ULF

These are the good days, the good days; and yet I have a fear.

SLAG

What do you fear? There is nothing to fear. No man is as wise as my master.

ULF

I fear the gods whom we pretend to be.

SLAG

The gods?

AGMAR (*taking a chunk of meat from his lips*)

Come hither, Slag.

SLAG (*going up to him*)

Yes, master.

AGMAR

Watch in the doorway while I eat. (*Slag goes to the doorway*) Sit in the attitude of a god. Warn me if any of the citizens approach.

[*Slag sits in the doorway in the attitude of a god, back to the audience.*

OOGNO (*to Agmar*)

But, master, shall we not have Woldery wine?

AGMAR

We shall have all things if only we are wise at first for a little.

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT II

THAHN

Master, do any suspect us?

AGMAR

We must be *very* wise.

THAHN

But if we are not wise, master?

AGMAR

Why, then death may come to us —

THAHN

O master!

AGMAR

— slowly.

[All stir uneasily except Slag, who sits motionless
in the doorway.

OOGNO

Do they believe us, master?

SLAG (*half turning his head*)

Someone comes.

[Slag resumes his position.

AGMAR (*putting away his meat*)

We shall soon know now.

[All take up the attitude. Enter One, *loquitur*.

ONE

Master, I want the god that does not eat.

AGMAR

I am he.

ONE

Master, my child was bitten in the throat by a
death-adder at noon. Spare him, master; he still
breathes, but slowly.

AGMAR

Is he indeed your child?

ACT II] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

ONE

He is surely my child, master.

AGMAR

Was it your wont to thwart him in his play, while
he was strong and well?

ONE

I never thwarted him, master.

AGMAR

Whose child is Death?

ONE

Death is the child of the gods.

AGMAR

Do you that never thwarted your child in his play
ask this of the gods?

ONE (*with some horror, perceiving Agmar's meaning*)
Master!

AGMAR

Weep not. For all the houses that men have builded
are the play-fields of this child of the gods.

[*The Man goes away in silence, not weeping.*

OOGNO (*taking Thahn by the wrist*)

Is this indeed a man?

AGMAR

A man, a man, and until just now a hungry one.

CURTAIN

THE THIRD ACT

Same room.

A few days have elapsed.

Seven thrones shaped like mountain-crags stand along the back of the stage. On these the beggars are lounging. The Thief is absent.

MLAN

Never had beggars such a time.

OOGNO

Ah, the fruits and tender lamb!

THAHN

The Woldery wine!

SLAG

It was better to see my master's wise devices than to have fruit and lamb and Woldery wine.

MLAN

Ah! When they spied on him to see if he would eat when they went away!

OOGNO

When they questioned him concerning the gods and Man!

THAHN

When they asked him why the gods permitted cancer!

SLAG

Ah, my wise master!

MLAN

How well his scheme has succeeded!

ACT III] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

OOGNO

How far away is hunger!

THAHN

It is even like to one of last year's dreams, the trouble of a brief night long ago.

OOGNO (*laughing*)

Ho, ho, ho! To see them pray to us.

AGMAR

When we were beggars did we not speak as beggars? Did we not whine as they? Was not our mien beggarly?

OOGNO

We were the pride of our calling.

AGMAR

Then now that we are gods, let us be as gods, and not mock our worshippers.

ULF

I think that the gods *do* mock their worshippers.

AGMAR

The gods have never mocked us. We are above all pinnacles that we have ever gazed at in dreams.

ULF

I think that when man is high then most of all are the gods wont to mock him.

THIEF (*entering*)

Master! I have been with those that know all and see all. I have been with the thieves, master. They know me for one of the craft, but they do not know me as being one of us.

AGMAR

Well, well!

THIEF

There is danger, master, there is great danger.

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT III]

AGMAR

You mean that they suspect that we are men.

THIEF

That they have long done, master. I mean that they will know it. Then we are lost.

AGMAR

Then they do not know it.

THIEF

They do not know it yet, but they will know it, and we are lost.

AGMAR

When will they know it?

THIEF

Three days ago they suspected us.

AGMAR

More than you think suspected us, but have any dared to say so?

THIEF

No, master.

AGMAR

Then forget your fears, my thief.

THIEF

Two men went on dromedaries three days ago to see if the gods were still at Marma.

AGMAR

They went to Marma!

THIEF

Yes, three days ago.

OOGNO

We are lost!

AGMAR

They went three days ago?

ACT III] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

THIEF

Yes, on dromedaries.

AGMAR

They should be back to-day.

OOGNO

We are lost!

THAHN

We are lost!

THIEF

They must have seen the green jade idols sitting against the mountains. They will say, "The gods are still at Marma." And we shall be burnt.

SLAG

My master will yet devise a plan.

AGMAR (*to the Thief*)

Slip away to some high place and look toward the desert and see how long we have to devise a plan.

SLAG

My master will find a plan.

OOGNO

He has taken us into a trap.

THAHN

His wisdom is our doom.

SLAG

He will find a wise plan yet.

THIEF (*reentering*)

It is too late!

AGMAR

It is too late!

THIEF

The dromedary men are here.

OOGNO

We are lost!

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT III]

AGMAR

Be silent! I must think.

[*They all sit still. Citizens enter and prostrate themselves. Agmar sits deep in thought.*

ILLANAUN (to Agmar)

Two holy pilgrims have gone to your sacred shrines, wherein you were wont to sit before you left the mountains. (*Agmar says nothing*) They return even now.

AGMAR

They left us here and went to find the gods? A fish once took a journey into a far country to find the sea.

ILLANAUN

Most reverend deity, their piety is so great that they have gone to worship even your shrines.

AGMAR

I know these men that have great piety. Such men have often prayed to me before, but their prayers are not acceptable. They little love the gods; their only care is their piety. I know these pious ones. They will say that the seven gods were still at Marma. They will lie and say that we were still at Marma. So shall they seem more pious to you all, pretending that they alone have seen the gods. Fools shall believe them and share in their damnation.

OORANDER (to Illanaun)

Hush! You anger the gods.

ILLANAUN

I am not sure whom I anger.

OORANDER

It may be they are the gods.

ACT III] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

ILLANAUN

Where are these men from Marma?

CITIZEN

Here are the dromedary men; they are coming now.

ILLANAUN (*to Agmar*)

The holy pilgrims from your shrine are come to worship you.

AGMAR

The men are doubters. How the gods hate the word! Doubt ever contaminated virtue. Let them be cast into prison and not besmirch your purity.

(*Rising*) Let them not enter here.

ILLANAUN

But oh, most reverend deity from the Mountain, we also doubt, most reverend deity.

AGMAR

You have chosen. You have chosen. And yet it is not too late. Repent and cast these men in prison and it may not be too late. *The gods have never wept.* And yet when they think upon damnation and the dooms that are withering a myriad bones, then almost, were they not divine, they could weep. Be quick! Repent of your doubt.

[Enter the Dromedary Men.

ILLANAUN

Most reverend deity, it is a mighty doubt.

CITIZENS

Nothing has killed him! They are not the gods!

SLAG (*to Agmar*)

You have a plan, my master. You have a plan.

AGMAR

Not yet, Slag.

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT III]

ILLANAUN (*to Oorander*)

These are the men that went to the shrines at
Marma.

OORANDER (*in a loud, clear voice*)

Were the Gods of the Mountain seated still at
Marma, or were they not there?

[*The beggars get up hurriedly from their thrones.*

DROMEDARY MAN

They were not there.

ILLANAUN

They were not there?

DROMEDARY MAN

Their shrines were empty.

OORANDER

Behold the Gods of the Mountain!

AKMOS

They have indeed come from Marma.

OORANDER

Come. Let us go away to prepare a sacrifice. A
mighty sacrifice to atone for our doubting. (*Ex-*
eunt)

SLAG

My most wise master!

AGMAR

No, no, Slag. I do not know what has befallen.
When I went by Marma only two weeks ago the
idols of green jade were still seated there.

OOGNO

We are saved now.

THAHN

Ay, we are saved.

AGMAR

We are saved, but I know not how.

ACT III] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

OOGNO

Never had beggars such a time.

THIEF

I will go out and watch. (*He creeps out*)

ULF

Yet I have a fear.

OOGNO

A fear? Why, we are saved.

ULF

Last night I dreamed.

OOGNO

What was your dream?

ULF

It was nothing. I dreamed that I was thirsty and one gave me Woldery wine; yet there was a fear in my dream.

THAHN

When I drink Woldery wine I am afraid of nothing.

THIEF (*re-entering*)

They are making a pleasant banquet ready for us; they are killing lambs, and girls are there with fruits, and there is to be much Woldery wine.

MLAN

Never had beggars such a time.

AGMAR

Do any doubt us now?

THIEF

I do not know.

MLAN

When will the banquet be?

THIEF

When the stars come out.

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT III]

OOGNO

Ah! It is sunset already. There will be good eating.

THAHN

We shall see the girls come in with baskets upon their heads.

OOGNO

There will be fruits in the baskets.

THAHN

All the fruits of the valley.

MLAN

Oh, how long we have wandered along the ways of the world!

SLAG

Oh, how hard they were!

THAHN

And how dusty!

OOGNO

And how little wine!

MLAN

How long we have asked and asked, and for how much!

AGMAR

We to whom all things are coming now at last!

THIEF

I fear lest my art forsake me now that good things come without stealing.

AGMAR

You will need your art no longer.

SLAG

The wisdom of my master shall suffice us all our days.

ACT III] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

[Enter a frightened Man. He kneels before Agmar and abases his forehead.

MAN

Master, we implore you, the people beseech you.
[Agmar and the beggars in the attitude of the gods sit silent.

MAN

Master, it is terrible. (*The beggars maintain silence*) It is terrible when you wander in the evening. It is terrible on the edge of the desert in the evening. Children die when they see you.

AGMAR

In the desert? When did you see us?

MAN

Last night, master. You were terrible last night. You were terrible in the gloaming. When your hands were stretched out and groping. You were feeling for the city.

AGMAR

Last night do you say?

MAN

You were terrible in the gloaming!

AGMAR

You yourself saw us?

MAN

Yes, master, you were terrible. Children too saw you and they died.

AGMAR

You say you saw us?

MAN

Yes, master. Not as you are now, but otherwise. We implore you, master, not to wander at evening. You are terrible in the gloaming. You are—

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT III]

AGMAR

You say we appeared not as we are now. How did we appear to you?

MAN

Otherwise, master, otherwise.

AGMAR

But how did we appear to you?

MAN

You were all green, master, all green in the gloaming, all of rock again as you used to be in the mountains. Master, we can bear to see you in flesh like men, but when we see rock walking it is terrible, it is terrible.

AGMAR

That is how we appeared to you?

MAN

Yes, master. Rock should not walk. When children see it they do not understand. Rock should not walk in the evening.

AGMAR

There have been doubters of late. Are they satisfied?

MAN

Master, they are terrified. Spare us, master.

AGMAR

It is wrong to doubt. Go and be faithful.

[Exit Man.]

SLAG

What have they seen, master?

AGMAR

They have seen their own fears dancing in the desert. They have seen something green after the light was

ACT III] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

gone, and some child has told them a tale that it was us. I do not know what they have seen. What should they have seen?

ULF

Something was coming this way from the desert, he said.

SLAG

What should come from the desert?

AGMAR

They are a foolish people.

ULF

That man's white face has seen some frightful thing.

SLAG

A frightful thing?

ULF

That man's face has been near to some frightful thing.

AGMAR

It is only we that have frightened them and their fears have made them foolish.

[Enter an Attendant with a torch or lantern which he places in a receptacle. Exit.

THAHN

Now we shall see the faces of the girls when they come to the banquet.

MLAN

Never had beggars such a time.

AGMAR

Hark! They are coming. I hear footsteps.

THAHN

The dancing girls! They are coming!

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT III]

THIEF

There is no sound of flutes, they said they would come with music.

OOGNO

What heavy boots they have; they sound like feet of stone.

THAHLN

I do not like to hear their heavy tread. Those that would dance to us must be light of foot.

AGMAR

I shall not smile at them if they are not airy.

MLAN

They are coming very slowly. They should come nimbly to us.

THAHLN

They should dance as they come. But the footfall is like the footfall of heavy crabs.

ULF (*in a loud voice, almost chanting*)

I have a fear, an old fear and a boding. We have done ill in the sight of the seven gods. Beggars we were and beggars we should have remained. We have given up our calling and come in sight of our doom. I will no longer let my fear be silent; it shall run about and cry; it shall go from me crying, like a dog from out of a doomed city; for my fear has seen calamity and has known an evil thing.

SLAG (*hoarsely*)

Master!

AGMAR (*rising*)

Come, come!

[*They listen. No one speaks. The stony boots come on. Enter in single file through door in right of back, a procession of seven green men, even hands*

ACT III] GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

and faces are green; they wear greenstone sandals; they walk with knees extremely wide apart, as having sat cross-legged for centuries; their right arms and right forefingers point upward, right elbows resting on left hands; they stoop grotesquely. Halfway to the footlights they left wheel. They pass in front of the seven beggars, now in terrified attitudes, and six of them sit down in the attitude described, with their backs to the audience. The leader stands, still stooping.

OOGNO (*cries out just as they wheel left*)

The Gods of the Mountain!

AGMAR (*hoarsely*)

Be still! They are dazzled by the light. They may not see us.

[*The leading Green Thing points his forefinger at the lantern—the flame turns green. When the six are seated the leader points one by one at each of the seven beggars, shooting out his forefinger at them. As he does this each beggar in his turn gathers himself back on to his throne and crosses his legs, his right arm goes stiffly upward with forefinger erect, and a staring look of horror comes into his eyes. In this attitude the beggars sit motionless while a green light falls upon their faces. The gods go out.*

Presently enter the Citizens, some with victuals and fruit. One touches a beggar's arm and then another's.

CITIZEN

They are cold; they have turned to stone.

[*All abase themselves, foreheads to the floor.*

ONE

We have doubted them. We have doubted them.

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN [ACT III

They have turned to stone because we have doubted them.

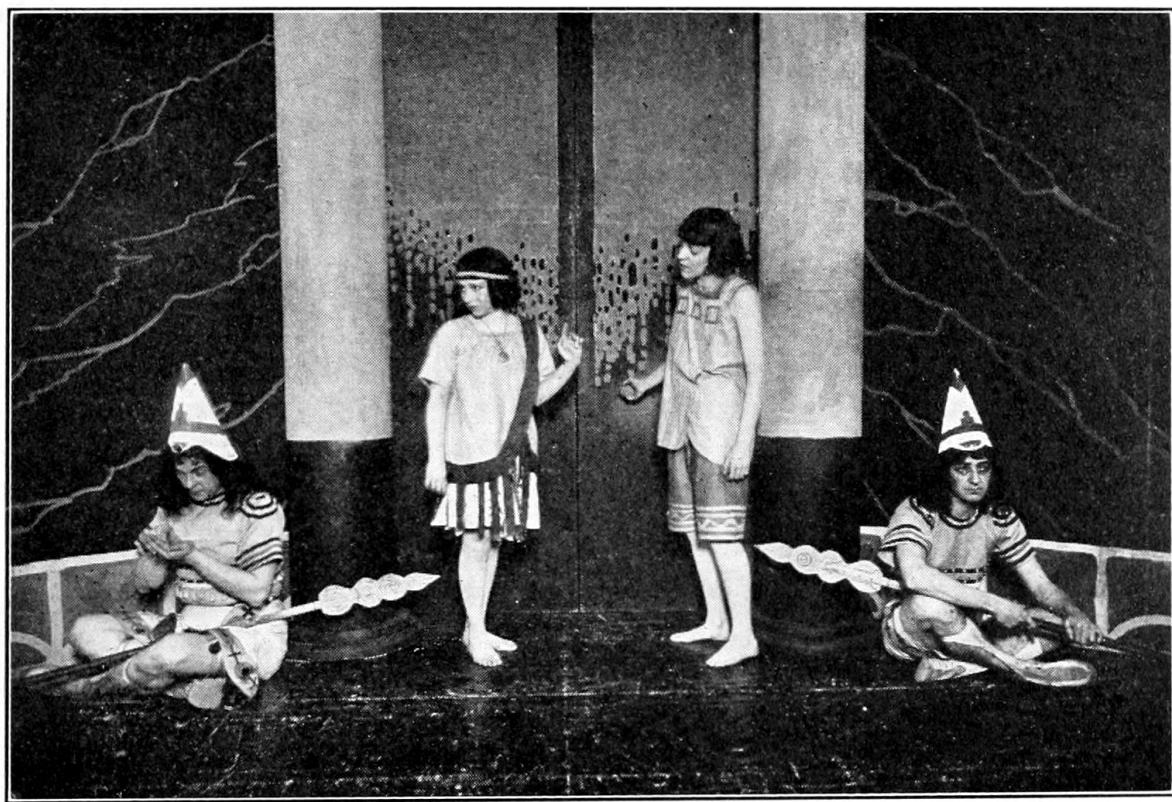
ANOTHER

They were the true gods.

ALL

They were the true gods.

CURTAIN



THE GOLDEN DOOM

First produced on November 19th,
1912, at the Haymarket Theatre in
London, England. First published in
Dunsany's *Five Plays*, 1911.

PERSONS

THE KING
CHAMBERLAIN
CHIEF PROPHET
GIRL
BOY
SPIES
FIRST PROPHET
SECOND PROPHET
FIRST SENTRY
SECOND SENTRY
STRANGER
ATTENDANTS

Scene: Outside the King's great door in Zericon.

Time: Some while before the fall of Babylon.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

Two Sentries pace to and fro, then halt, one on each side of the great door.

FIRST SENTRY

The day is deadly sultry.

SECOND SENTRY

I would that I were swimming down the Gyshon, on the cool side, under the fruit trees.

FIRST SENTRY

It is like to thunder or the fall of a dynasty.

SECOND SENTRY

It will grow cool by night-fall. Where is the King?

FIRST SENTRY

He rows in his golden barge with ambassadors or whispers with captains concerning future wars. The stars spare him!

SECOND SENTRY

Why do you say "the stars spare him"?

FIRST SENTRY

Because if a doom from the stars fall suddenly on a king it swallows up his people and all things round about him, and his palace falls and the walls of his city and citadel, and the apes come in from the woods and the large beasts from the desert, so that you would not say that a king had been there at all.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

SECOND SENTRY

But why should a doom from the stars fall on the King?

FIRST SENTRY

Because he seldom placates them.

SECOND SENTRY

Ah! I have heard that said of him.

FIRST SENTRY

Who are the stars that a man should scorn them? Should they that rule the thunder, the plague and the earthquake withhold these things save for much prayer? Always ambassadors are with the King, and his commanders, come in from distant lands, prefects of cities and makers of the laws, but never the priests of the stars.

SECOND SENTRY

Hark! Was that thunder?

FIRST SENTRY

Believe me, the stars are angry.

[Enter a Stranger. He wanders toward the King's door, gazing about him.

SENTRIES (lifting their spears at him)

Go back! Go back!

STRANGER

Why?

FIRST SENTRY

It is death to touch the King's door.

STRANGER

I am a stranger from Thessaly.

FIRST SENTRY

It is death even for a stranger.

STRANGER

Your door is strangely sacred.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

FIRST SENTRY

It is death to touch it.

[*The Stranger wanders off.*

[Enter two children hand in hand.

BOY (*to the Sentry*)

I want to see the King to pray for a hoop.

[*The Sentry smiles.*

BOY (*pushes the door; to girl*)

I cannot open it. (*To the Sentry*) Will it do as well if I pray to the King's door?

SENTRY

Yes, quite as well. (*Turns to talk to the other Sentry*) Is there anyone in sight?

SECOND SENTRY (*shading his eyes*)

Nothing but a dog, and he far out on the plain.

FIRST SENTRY

Then we can talk awhile and eat bash.

BOY

King's door, I want a little hoop.

[*The Sentries take a little bash between finger and thumb from pouches and put that wholly forgotten drug to their lips.*

GIRL (*pointing*)

My father is a taller soldier than that.

BOY

My father can write. He taught me.

GIRL

Ho! Writing frightens nobody. My father is a soldier.

BOY

I have a lump of gold. I found it in the stream that runs down to Gyshon.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

GIRL

I have a poem. I found it in my own head.

BOY

Is it a long poem?

GIRL

No. But it would have been only there were no more
rhymes for sky.

BOY

What is your poem?

GIRL

I saw a purple bird
Go up against the sky
And it went up and up
And round about did fly.

BOY

I saw it die.

GIRL

That does n't scan.

BOY

Oh, that does n't matter.

GIRL

Do you like my poem?

BOY

Birds are n't purple.

GIRL

My bird was.

BOY

Oh!

GIRL

Oh, you don't like my poem!

BOY

Yes, I do.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

GIRL

No, you don't; you think it horrid.

BOY

No. I don't.

GIRL

Yes, you do. Why did n't you say you liked it?
It is the only poem I ever made.

BOY

I do like it. I do like it.

GIRL

You don't, you don't!

BOY

Don't be angry. I'll write it on the door for you.

GIRL

You'll write it?

BOY

Yes, I can write it. My father taught me. I'll
write it with my lump of gold. It makes a yellow
mark on the iron door.

GIRL

Oh, do write it! I would like to see it written like
real poetry.

[*The Boy begins to write. The Girl watches.*

FIRST SENTRY

You see, we'll be fighting again soon.

SECOND SENTRY

Only a little war. We never have more than a little
war with the hill-folk.

FIRST SENTRY

When a man goes to fight, the curtains of the gods
wax thicker than ever before between his eyes and the
future; he may go to a great or to a little war.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

SECOND SENTRY

There can only be a little war with the hill-folk.

FIRST SENTRY

Yet sometimes the gods laugh.

SECOND SENTRY

At whom?

FIRST SENTRY

At kings.

SECOND SENTRY

Why have you grown uneasy about this war in the hills?

FIRST SENTRY

Because the King is powerful beyond any of his fathers, and has more fighting men, more horses, and wealth that could have ransomed his father and his grandfather and dowered their queens and daughters; and every year his miners bring him more from the opal-mines and from the turquoise-quarries. He has grown very mighty.

SECOND SENTRY

Then he will the more easily crush the hill-folk in a little war.

FIRST SENTRY

When kings grow very mighty the stars grow very jealous.

BOY

I 've written your poem.

GIRL

Oh, have you really?

BOY

Yes, I 'll read it to you. (*He reads*)

I saw a purple bird

Go up against the sky

THE GOLDEN DOOM

And it went up and up
And round about did fly.
I saw it die.

GIRL

It does n't scan.

BOY

That does n't matter.

[Enter furtively a Spy, who crosses stage and goes out. The Sentries cease to talk.

GIRL

That man frightens me.

BOY

He is only one of the King's spies.

GIRL

But I don't like the King's spies. They frighten me.

BOY

Come on, then, we 'll run away.

SENTRY (*noticing the children again*)

Go away, go away! The King is coming, he will eat you.

[*The Boy throws a stone at the Sentry and runs out. Enter another Spy, who crosses the stage. Enter third Spy, who notices the door. He examines it and utters an owl-like whistle. No. 2 comes back. They do not speak. Both whistle. No. 3 comes. All examine the door. Enter the King and his Chamberlain. The King wears a purple robe. The Sentries smartly transfer their spears to their left hands and return their right arms to their right sides. They then lower their spears until their points are within an inch of the ground, at the same time raising their right hands above their heads. They*

THE GOLDEN DOOM

stand for some moments thus. Then they lower their right arms to their right sides, at the same time raising their spears. In the next motion they take their spears into their right hands and lower the butts to the floor, where they were before, the spears slanting forward a little. Both Sentries must move together precisely.

FIRST SPY (*runs forward to the King and kneels, abasing his forehead to the floor*) Something has written on the iron door.

CHAMBERLAIN

On the iron door!

KING

Some fool has done it. Who has been here since yesterday?

FIRST SENTRY (*shifts his hand a little higher on his spear, brings the spear to his side and closes his heels all in one motion; he then takes one pace backward with his right foot; then he kneels on his right knee; when he has done this he speaks, but not before*) Nobody, Majesty, but a stranger from Thessaly.

KING

Did he touch the iron door?

FIRST SENTRY

No, Majesty; he tried to, but we drove him away.

KING

How near did he come?

FIRST SENTRY

Nearly to our spears, Majesty.

KING

What was his motive in seeking to touch the iron door?

THE GOLDEN DOOM

FIRST SENTRY

I do not know, Majesty.

KING

Which way did he go?

FIRST SENTRY (*pointing left*)

That way, Majesty, an hour ago.

[*The King whispers with one of his Spies, who stoops and examines the ground and steals away. The Sentry rises.*

KING (*to his two remaining Spies*)

What does this writing say?

A SPY

We cannot read, Majesty.

KING

A good spy should know everything.

SECOND SPY

We watch, Majesty, and we search out, Majesty. We read shadows, and we read footprints, and whispers in secret places. But we do not read writing.

KING (*to the Chamberlain*)

See what it is.

CHAMBERLAIN (*goes up and reads*)

It is treason, Majesty.

KING

Read it.

CHAMBERLAIN

I saw a purple bird
Go up against the sky,
And it went up and up
And round about did fly.
I saw it die.

FIRST SENTRY (*aside*)

The stars have spoken.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

KING (*to the Sentry*)

Has anyone been here but the stranger from Thesaly?

SENTRY (*kneeling as before*)

Nobody, Majesty.

KING

You saw nothing?

FIRST SENTRY

Nothing but a dog far out upon the plain and the children of the guard at play.

KING (*to the Second Sentry*)

And you?

SECOND SENTRY (*kneeling*)

Nothing, Majesty.

CHAMBERLAIN

That is strange.

KING

It is some secret warning.

CHAMBERLAIN

It is treason.

KING

It is from the stars.

CHAMBERLAIN

No, no, Majesty. Not from the stars, not from the stars. Some man has done it. Yet the thing should be interpreted. Shall I send for the prophets of the stars?

[*The King beckons to his Spies. They run up to him.*

KING

Find me some prophet of the stars. (*Exeunt Spies*)

I fear that we may go no more, my chamberlain, along the winding ways of unequalled Zericon, nor

THE GOLDEN DOOM

play dahoori with the golden balls. I have thought more of my people than of the stars and more of Zericon than of windy Heaven.

CHAMBERLAIN

Believe me, Majesty, some idle man has written it and passed by. Your spies shall find him, and then his name will be soon forgotten.

KING

Yes, yes. Perhaps you are right, though the sentries saw no one. No doubt some beggar did it.

CHAMBERLAIN

Yes, Majesty, some beggar has surely done it. But look, here come two prophets of the stars. They shall tell us that this is idle.

[Enter two Prophets and a Boy attending them.
All bow deeply to the King. The two Spies steal in again and stand at back.]

KING

Some beggar has written a rhyme on the iron gate, and as the ways of rhyme are known to you I desired you, rather as poets than as prophets, to say whether there was any meaning in it.

CHAMBERLAIN

'T is but an idle rhyme.

FIRST PROPHET (*bows again and goes up to door. He glances at the writing*) Come hither, servant of those that serve the stars.

[Attendant approaches.]

FIRST PROPHET

Bring hither our golden cloaks, for this may be a matter for rejoicing; and bring our green cloaks also, for this may tell of young new beautiful things

THE GOLDEN DOOM

with which the stars will one day gladden the King;
and bring our black cloaks also, for it may be a
doom. (*Exit the Boy; the Prophet goes up to the
door and reads solemnly*) The stars have spoken.
[Re-enter Attendant with cloaks.]

KING

I tell you that some beggar has written this.

FIRST PROPHET

It is written in pure gold. (*He dons the black cloak
over body and head*)

KING

What do the stars mean? What warning is it?

FIRST PROPHET

I cannot say.

KING (*to Second Prophet*)

Come you then and tell us what the warning is.

SECOND PROPHET (*goes up to the door and reads*)

The stars have spoken. (*He cloaks himself in black*)

KING

What is it? What does it mean?

SECOND PROPHET

We do not know, but it is from the stars.

CHAMBERLAIN

It is a harmless thing; there is no harm in it, Majesty. Why should not birds die?

KING

Why have the prophets covered themselves in black?

CHAMBERLAIN

They are a secret people and look for inner meanings. There is no harm in it.

KING

They have covered themselves in black.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

CHAMBERLAIN

They have not spoken of any evil thing. They have not spoken of it.

KING

If the people see the prophets covered in black they will say that the stars are against me and believe that my luck has turned.

CHAMBERLAIN

The people must not know.

KING

Some prophet must interpret to us the doom. Let the chief prophet of the stars be sent for.

CHAMBERLAIN (*going toward left exit*)

Summon the chief prophet of the stars that look on Zericon.

VOICES OFF

The chief prophet of the stars. The chief prophet of the stars.

CHAMBERLAIN

I have summoned the chief prophet, Majesty.

KING

If he interpret this aright I will put a necklace of turquoises round his neck with opals from the mines.

CHAMBERLAIN

He will not fail. He is a very cunning interpreter.

KING

What if he covers himself with a huge black cloak and does not speak and goes muttering away, slowly with bended head, till our fear spreads to the sentries and they cry aloud?

CHAMBERLAIN

This is no doom from the stars, but some idle scribe

THE GOLDEN DOOM

hath written it in his insolence upon the iron door,
wasting his hoard of gold.

KING

Not for myself I have a fear of doom, not for myself; but I inherited a rocky land, windy and ill-nurtured, and nursed it to prosperity by years of peace and spread its boundaries by years of war. I have brought up harvests out of barren acres and given good laws unto naughty towns, and my people are happy, and lo, the stars are angry!

CHAMBERLAIN

It is not the stars, it is not the stars, Majesty, for the prophets of the stars have not interpreted it. Indeed, it was only some reveller wasting his gold.
[Meanwhile enter Chief Prophet of the stars that look on Zericon.

KING

Chief Prophet of the Stars that look on Zericon, I would have you interpret the rhyme upon yonder door.

CHIEF PROPHET (*goes up to the door and reads*)
It is from the stars.

KING

Interpret it and you shall have great turquoises round your neck, with opals from the mines in the frozen mountains.

CHIEF PROPHET (*cloaks himself like the others in a great black cloak*) Who should wear purple in the land but a King, or who go up against the sky but he who has troubled the stars by neglecting their ancient worship? Such a one has gone up and up increasing power and wealth, such a one has soared above the crowns of those that went before him,

THE GOLDEN DOOM

such a one the stars have doomed, the undying ones,
the illustrious.

[*A pause.*]

KING

Who wrote it?

CHIEF PROPHET

It is pure gold. Some god has written it.

CHAMBERLAIN

Some god?

CHIEF PROPHET

Some god whose home is among the undying stars.

FIRST SENTRY (*aside to the Second Sentry*)

Last night I saw a star go flaming earthward.

KING

Is this a warning or is it a doom?

CHIEF PROPHET

The stars have spoken.

KING

It is, then, a doom?

CHIEF PROPHET

They speak not in jest.

KING

I have been a great King—Let it be said of me
“The stars overthrew him, and they sent a god for
his doom.” For I have not met my equal among
kings that man should overthrow me; and I have
not oppressed my people that man should rise up
against me.

CHIEF PROPHET

It is better to give worship to the stars than to do
good to man. It is better to be humble before the
gods than proud in the face of your enemy though
he do evil.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

KING

Let the stars hearken yet and I will sacrifice a child to them—I will sacrifice a girl child to the twinkling stars and a male child to the stars that blink not, the stars of the steadfast eyes. (*To his Spies*) Let a boy and girl be brought for sacrifice. (*Exit a Spy to the right looking at footprints*) Will you accept this sacrifice to the god that the stars have sent? They say that the gods love children.

CHIEF PROPHET

I may refuse no sacrifice to the stars nor to the gods whom they send. (*To the other Prophets*) Make ready the sacrificial knives.

[*The Prophets draw knives and sharpen them.*

KING

Is it fitting that the sacrifice take place by the iron door where the god from the stars has trod, or must it be in the temple?

CHIEF PROPHET

Let it be offered by the iron door. (*To the other Prophets*) Fetch hither the altar stone.

[*The owl-like whistle is heard off right. The Third Spy runs crouching toward it. Exit.*

KING

Will this sacrifice avail to avert the doom?

CHIEF PROPHET

Who knows?

KING

I fear that even yet the doom will fall.

CHIEF PROPHET

It were wise to sacrifice some greater thing.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

KING

What more can a man offer?

CHIEF PROPHET

His pride.

KING

What pride?

CHIEF PROPHET

Your pride that went up against the sky and
troubled the stars.

KING

How shall I sacrifice my pride to the stars?

CHIEF PROPHET

It is upon your pride that the doom will fall, and
will take away your crown and will take away your
kingdom.

KING

I will sacrifice my crown and reign uncrowned
amongst you, so only I save my kingdom.

CHIEF PROPHET

If you sacrifice your crown which is your pride,
and if the stars accept it, perhaps the god that
they sent may avert the doom and you may still
reign in your kingdom though humbled and un-
crowned.

KING

Shall I burn my crown with spices and with incense
or cast it into the sea?

CHIEF PROPHET

Let it be laid here by the iron door where the god
came who wrote the golden doom. When he comes
again by night to shrivel up the city or to pour
an enemy in through the iron door, he will see your

THE GOLDEN DOOM

cast-off pride and perhaps accept it and take it away to the neglected stars.

KING (*to the Chamberlain*)

Go after my spies and say that I make no sacrifice.
(*Exit the Chamberlain to the right; the King takes off his crown*) Good-bye, my brittle glory; kings have sought you; the stars have envied you. (*The stage grows darker*)

CHIEF PROPHET

Even now the sun has set who denies the stars, and the day is departed wherein no gods walk abroad. It is near the hour when spirits roam the earth and all things that go unseen, and the faces of the abiding stars will be soon revealed to the fields. Lay your crown there and let us come away.

KING (*lays his crown before the iron door; then to the Sentries*) Go! And let no man come near the door all night.

THE SENTRIES (*kneeling*)

Yes, Majesty.

[*They remain kneeling until after the King has gone. King and the Chief Prophet walk away.*

CHIEF PROPHET

It was your pride. Let it be forgotten. May the stars accept it. (*Exeunt left*)

[*The Sentries rise.*

FIRST SENTRY

The stars have envied him!

SECOND SENTRY

It is an ancient crown. He wore it well.

FIRST SENTRY

May the stars accept it.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

SECOND SENTRY

If they do not accept it what doom will overtake him?

FIRST SENTRY

It will suddenly be as though there were never any city of Zericon nor two sentries like you and me standing before the door.

SECOND SENTRY

Why! How do you know?

FIRST SENTRY

That is ever the way of the gods.

SECOND SENTRY

But it is unjust.

FIRST SENTRY

How should the gods know that?

SECOND SENTRY

Will it happen to-night?

FIRST SENTRY

Come! we must march away. (*Exeunt right*)
[The stage grows increasingly darker. Re-enter the Chamberlain from the right. He walks across the Stage and goes out to the left. Re-enter Spies from the right. They cross the stage, which is now nearly dark.]

BOY (enters from the right, dressed in white, his hands out a little, crying) King's door, King's door, I want my little hoop. (He goes up to the King's door. When he sees the King's crown there, he utters a satisfied) O-oh! (He takes it up, puts it on the ground, and, beating it before him with the sceptre, goes out by the way that he entered)
[The great door opens; there is light within; a furtive Spy slips out and sees that the crown is gone.]

THE GOLDEN DOOM

Another Spy slips out. Their crouching heads come close together.

FIRST SPY (hoarse whisper)

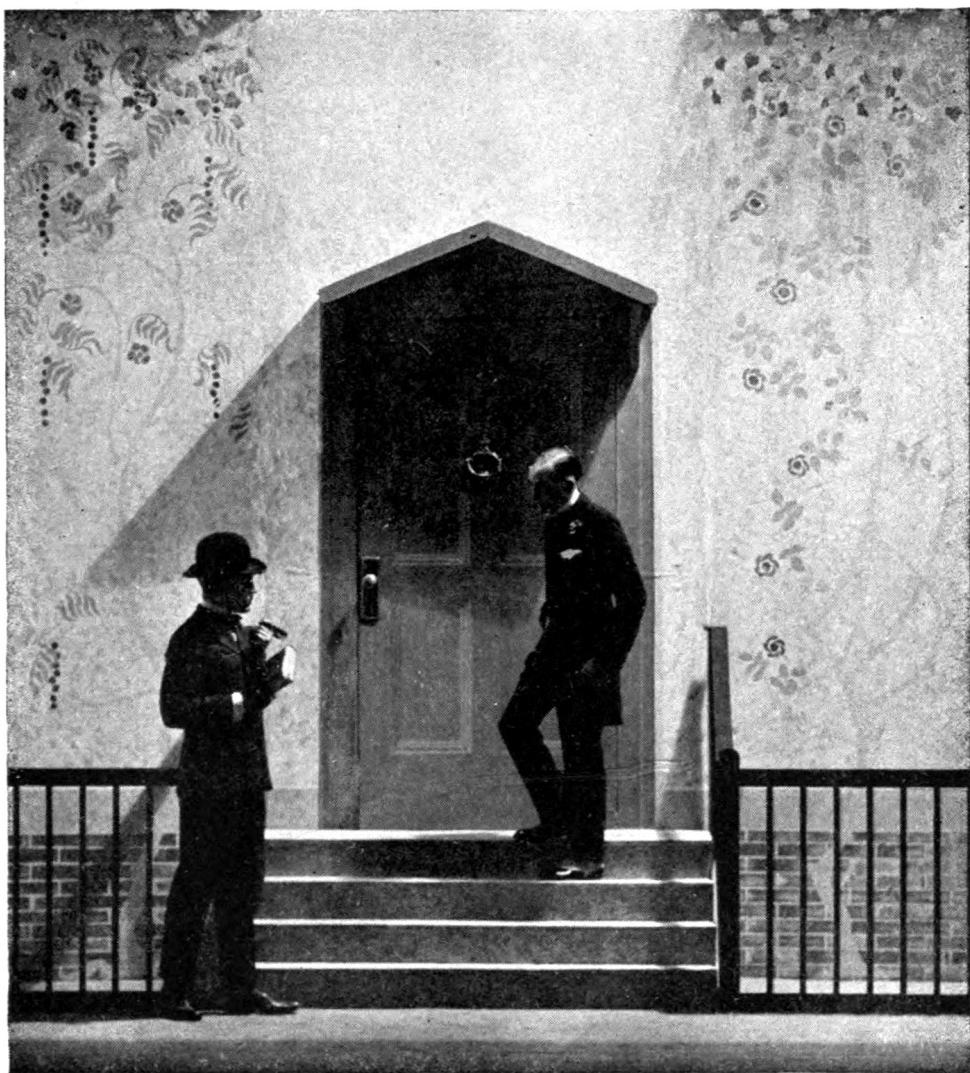
The gods have come!

[*They run back through the door and the door is closed. It opens again and the King and the Chamberlain come through.*

KING

The stars are satisfied.

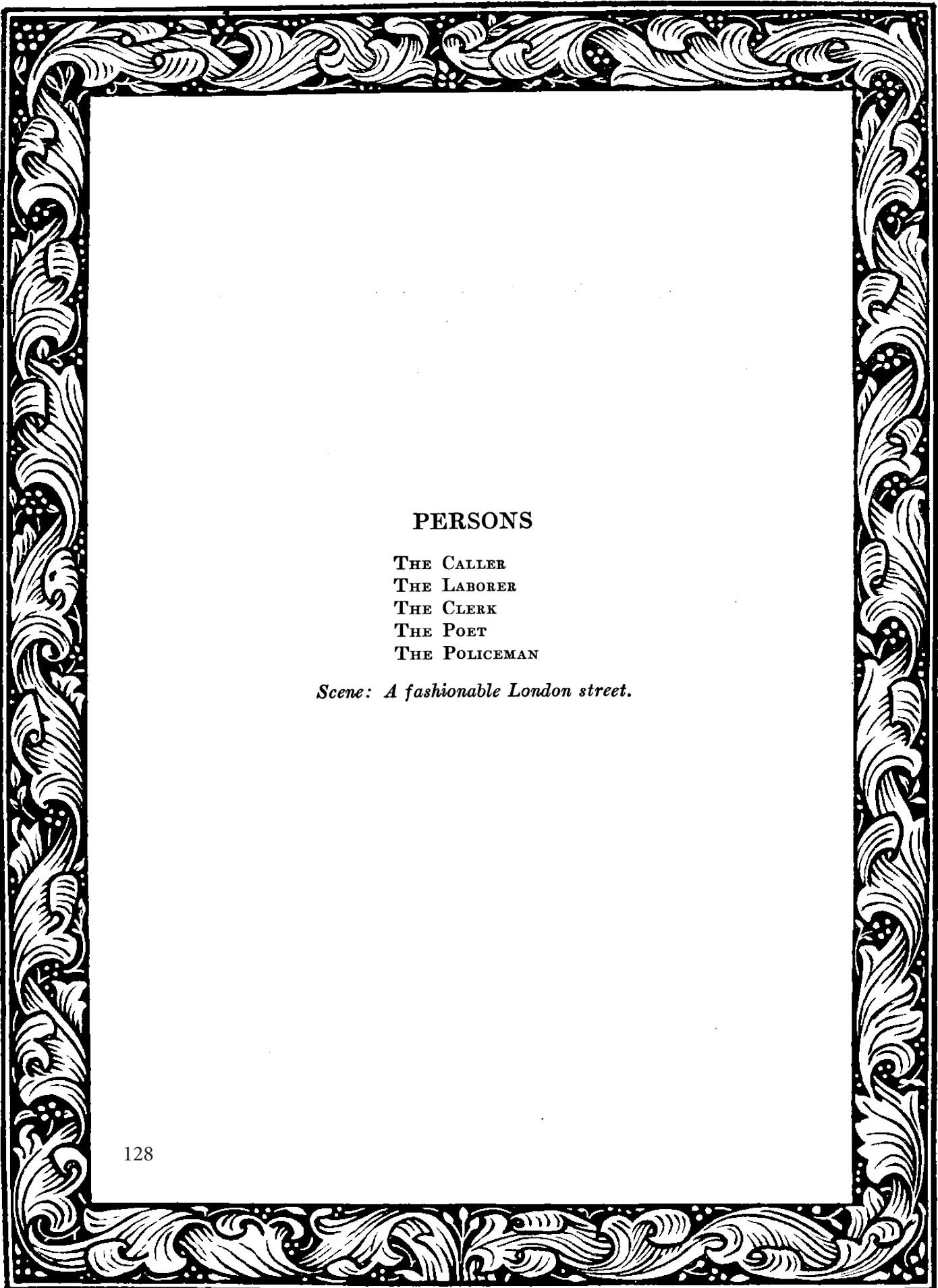
CURTAIN



THE LOST SILK HAT

THE LOST SILK HAT

First produced on August 14th, 1913,
at the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester,
England, directed by B. Iden Payne.
First published in Dunsany's *Five Plays*,
1911.



PERSONS

THE CALLER
THE LABORER
THE CLERK
THE POET
THE POLICEMAN

Scene: A fashionable London street.

THE LOST SILK HAT

The Caller stands on a doorstep, "faultlessly dressed," but without a hat. At first he shows despair, then a new thought engrosses him.

Enter the Laborer.

THE CALLER

Excuse me a moment. Excuse me — but — I'd be greatly obliged to you if — if you could see your way — in fact, you can be of great service to me if —

THE LABORER

Glad to do what I can, sir.

CALLER

Well, all I really want you to do is just to ring that bell and go up and say — er — say that you've come to see to the drains, or anything like that, you know, and get hold of my hat for me.

LABORER

Get hold of your 'at!

CALLER

Yes. You see, I left my hat behind most unfortunately. It's in the drawing-room (*points to window*), that room there, half under the long sofa, the far end from the door. And if you could possibly go and get it, why I'd be (*The Laborer's expression changes*) — Why, what's the matter?

LABORER (firmly)

I don't like this job.

THE LOST SILK HAT

CALLER

Don't like this job! But my dear fellow, don't be silly, what possible harm — ?

LABORER

Ah-h. That's what I don't know.

CALLER

But what harm can there possibly be in so simple a request? What harm does there seem to be?

LABORER

Oh, it seems all right.

CALLER

Well, then.

LABORER

All these crack jobs do seem all right.

CALLER

But I'm not asking you to rob the house.

LABORER

Don't seem as if you are, certainly, but I don't like the looks of it; what if there's things what I can't 'elp taking when I gets inside?

CALLER

I only want my hat — Here, I say, please don't go away — here's a sovereign, it will only take you a minute.

LABORER

What I want to know —

CALLER

Yes?

LABORER

— Is what's *in* that hat?

CALLER

What's *in* the hat?

THE LOST SILK HAT

LABORER

Yes; that's what I want to know.

CALLER

What's *in* the hat?

LABORER

Yes, you are n't going to give me a sovereign — ?

CALLER

I'll give you two sovereigns.

LABORER

You are n't going to give me a sovereign, and rise it
to two sovereigns, for an *empty* hat?

CALLER

But I must have my hat. I can't be seen in the
streets like this. There's nothing *in* the hat. What
do you think 's in the hat?

LABORER

Ah, I'm not clever enough to say that, but it looks
as if the papers was in that hat.

CALLER

The papers?

LABORER

Yes, papers proving, if you can get them, that
you're the heir to that big house, and some poor
innocent will be defrauded.

CALLER

Look here, the hat's absolutely empty. I *must*
have my hat. If there's anything in it you shall
have it yourself as well as the two pounds, only
get me my hat.

LABORER

Well, that seems all right.

CALLER

That's right, then you'll run up and get it?

THE LOST SILK HAT

LABORER

Seems all right to me and seems all right to you.
But it's the police what you and I have got to
think of. Will it seem all right to them?

CALLER

Oh, for heaven's sake —

LABORER

Ah!

CALLER

What a hopeless fool you are.

LABORER

Ah!

CALLER

Look here.

LABORER

Ah, I got you there, mister.

CALLER

Look here, for goodness sake don't go.

LABORER

Ah! (*Exit*)

[Enter the Clerk.

CALLER

Excuse me, sir. Excuse my asking you, but, as
you see, I am without a hat. I shall be extraordi-
narily obliged to you if you would be so very good
as to get it for me. Pretend you have come to wind
the clocks, you know. I left it in the drawing-
room of this house, half under the long sofa, the
far end.

CLERK

Oh, er — all right, only —

CALLER

Thanks so much, I am immensely indebted to you.

THE LOST SILK HAT

Just say you've come to wind the clocks, you know.

CLERK

I—er—don't think I'm very good at winding clocks, you know.

CALLER

Oh, that's all right, just stand in front of the clock and fool about with it. That's all they ever do. I must warn you there's a lady in the room.

CLERK

Oh!

CALLER

But that's all right, you know. Just walk past up to the clock.

CLERK

But I think, if you don't mind, as there's someone there—

CALLER

Oh, but she's quite young and very, very beautiful and—

CLERK

Why don't you get it yourself?

CALLER

That is impossible.

CLERK

Impossible?

CALLER

Yes, I have sprained my ankle.

CLERK

Oh! Is it bad?

CALLER

Yes, very bad indeed.

THE LOST SILK HAT

CLERK

I don't mind trying to carry you up.

CALLER

No, that would be worse. My foot has to be kept
on the ground.

CLERK

But how will you get home?

CALLER

I can walk all right on the flat.

CLERK

I'm afraid I have to be going on. It's rather
later than I thought.

CALLER

But for goodness sake don't leave me. You can't
leave me here like this without a hat.

CLERK

I'm afraid I must, it's later than I thought.

(Exit)

[Enter the Poet.

CALLER

Excuse me, sir. Excuse my stopping you. But I
should be immensely obliged to you if you would do
me a very great favor. I have unfortunately left my
hat behind while calling at this house. It is half
under the long sofa, at the far end. If you could
possibly be so kind as to pretend you have come to
tune the piano and fetch my hat for me I should be
enormously grateful to you.

POET

But why cannot you get it for yourself?

CALLER

I cannot.

THE LOST SILK HAT

POET

If you would tell me the reason perhaps I could help
you.

CALLER

I cannot. I can never enter that house again.

POET

If you have committed a murder, by all means tell
me. I am not sufficiently interested in ethics to wish
to have you hanged for it.

CALLER

Do I look like a murderer?

POET

No, of course not. I am only saying that you can
safely trust me, for not only does the statute book
and its penalties rather tend to bore me, but murder
itself has always had a certain fascination for me.
I write delicate and fastidious lyrics, yet, strange as
it may appear, I read every murder trial, and my
sympathies are always with the prisoner.

CALLER

But I tell you I am not a murderer.

POET

Then what have you done?

CALLER

I have quarrelled with a lady in that house and have
sworn to join the Bosnians and die in Africa.

POET

But this is beautiful.

CALLER

Unfortunately I forgot my hat.

POET

You go to die for a hopeless love, and in a far coun-
try; it was the wont of the troubadours.

THE LOST SILK HAT

CALLER

But you will get my hat for me?

POET

That I will gladly do for you. But we must find an adequate reason for entering the house.

CALLER

You pretend to tune the piano.

POET

That, unfortunately, is impossible. The sound of a piano being unskilfully handled is to me what the continual drop of cold water on the same part of the head is said to be in countries where that interesting torture is practised. There is —

CALLER

But what are we to do?

POET

There is a house where kind friends of mine have given me that security and comfort that are a poet's necessity. But there was a governess there and a piano. It is years and years since I was able even to see the faces of those friends without an inward shudder.

CALLER

Well, we 'll have to think of something else.

POET

You are bringing back to these unhappy days the romance of an age of which the ballads tell us that kings sometimes fought in no other armor than their lady's nightshirt.

CALLER

Yes, but you know first of all I must get my *hat*.

POET

But why?

THE LOST SILK HAT

CALLER

I cannot possibly be seen in the streets without
a hat.

POET

Why not?

CALLER

It can't be done.

POET

But you confuse externals with essentials.

CALLER

I don't know what you call essentials, but being
decently dressed in London seems pretty essential
to me.

POET

A hat is not one of the essential things of life.

CALLER

I don't want to appear rude, but my hat is n't quite
like yours.

POET

Let us sit down and talk of things that matter,
things that will be remembered after a hundred years.
(They sit) Regarded in this light one sees at once
the triviality of hats. But to die, and die beautifully
for a hopeless love, that is a thing one could make a
lyric about. That is the test of essential things —
try and imagine them in a lyric. One could not
write a lyric about a hat.

CALLER

I don't care whether you could write a lyric about
my hat or whether you could n't. All I know is that
I am not going to make myself absolutely ridiculous
by walking about in London without a hat. Will you
get it for me or will you not?

THE LOST SILK HAT

POET

To take any part in the tuning of a piano is impossible to me.

CALLER

Well, pretend you 've come to look at the radiator. They have one under the window, and I happen to know it leaks.

POET

I suppose it has an artistic decoration on it.

CALLER

Yes, I think so.

POET

Then I decline to look at it or to go near it. I know these decorations in cast iron. I once saw a pot-bellied Egyptian god, named Bēs, and he was *meant* to be ugly, but he was n't as ugly as these decorations that the twentieth century can make with machinery. What has a plumber got to do with art that he should dare to attempt decoration?

CALLER

Then you won't help me.

POET

I won't look at ugly things and I won't listen to ugly noises, but if you can think of any reasonable plan I don't mind helping you.

CALLER

I can think of nothing else. You don't look like a plumber or a clock-winder. I can think of nothing more. I have had a terrible ordeal and I am not in the condition to think calmly.

POET

Then you will have to leave your hat to its altered destiny.

THE LOST SILK HAT

CALLER

Why can't you think of a plan? If you're a poet,
thinking's rather in your line.

POET

If I could bring my thoughts to contemplate so absurd
a thing as a hat for any length of time no doubt
I could think of a plan, but the very triviality of the
theme seems to scare them away.

CALLER (*rising*)

Then I must get it myself.

POET

For Heaven's sake, don't do that! Think what it
means!

CALLER

I know it will seem absurd, but not so absurd as
walking through London without it.

POET

I don't mean that. But you will make it up. You
will forgive each other, and you will marry her and
have a family of noisy, pimply children like everyone
else, and Romance will be dead. No, don't ring that
bell. Go and buy a bayonet, or whatever one does
buy, and join the Bosnians.

CALLER

I tell you I can't without a hat.

POET

What is a hat! Will you sacrifice for it a beautiful
doom? Think of your bones, neglected and forgotten,
lying forlornly because of hopeless love on
endless golden sands. "Lying forlorn!" as Keats
said. What a word! Forlorn in Africa. The care-
less Bedouins going past by day, at night the lion's
roar, the grievous voice of the desert.

THE LOST SILK HAT

CALLER

As a matter of fact, I don't think you're right in speaking of it as desert. The Bosnians, I believe, are only taking it because it is supposed to be the most fertile land in the world.

POET

What of that? You will not be remembered by geography and statistics, but by golden-mouthed Romance. And that is how Romance sees Africa.

CALLER

Well, I'm going to get my hat.

POET

Think! Think! If you enter by that door you will never fall among the foremost Bosnians. You will never die in a far-off, lonely land to lie by immense Sahara. And she will never weep for your beautiful doom and call herself cruel in vain.

CALLER

Hark! She is playing the piano. It seems to me that she might be unhappy about it for years. I don't see much good in that.

POET

No. I will comfort her.

CALLER

I'm damned if you do! Look here! I don't mind saying, I'm damned if you do.

POET

Calm yourself. Calm yourself. I do not mean in that way.

CALLER

Then what on earth do you mean?

POET

I will make songs about your beautiful death, glad

THE LOST SILK HAT

songs and sad songs. They shall be glad because they tell again the noble tradition of the troubadours, and sad because they tell of your sorrowful destiny and of your hopeless love.

I shall make legends also about your lonely bones, telling perhaps how some Arabian men, finding them in the desert by some oasis, memorable in war, wonder who loved them. And then as I read them to her, she weeps perhaps a little, and I read instead of the glory of the soldier, how it overtops our transitory —

CALLER

Look here, I'm not aware that you've ever been introduced to her.

POET

A trifle, a trifle.

CALLER

It seems to me that you're in rather an undue hurry for me to get a Jubu spear in me; but I'm going to get my hat first.

POET

I appeal to you. I appeal to you in the name of beautiful battles, high deeds, and lost causes; in the name of love-tales told to cruel maidens and told in vain. In the name of stricken hearts broken like beautiful harp-strings, I appeal to you.

I appeal in the ancient holy name of Romance: *do not ring that bell.*

[*Caller rings the bell.*

POET (*sits down, abject*)

You will marry. You will sometimes take a ticket with your wife as far as Paris. Perhaps as far as Cannes. Then the family will come; a large sprawl-

THE LOST SILK HAT

ing family as far as the eye can see (I speak in hyperbole). You 'll earn money and feed it and be like all the rest. No monument will ever be set up to your memory but—

[*Servant answers bell. Caller says something inaudible. Exit through door.*]

POET (*rising, lifting hand*)

But let there be graven in brass upon this house: Romance was born again here out of due time and died young. (*He sits down*)

[*Enter Laborer and Clerk with Policeman. The music stops.*]

POLICEMAN

Anything wrong here?

POET

Everything's wrong. They 're going to kill Romance.

POLICEMAN (*to Laborer*)

This gentleman does n't seem quite right somehow.

LABORER

They 're none of them quite right to-day.

[*Music starts again.*]

POET

My God! It is a duet.

POLICEMAN

He seems a bit wrong somehow.

LABORER

You should 'a seen the other one.

CURTAIN



Photo by Byron Co., N. Y. Courtesy of Neighborhood Playhouse

A NIGHT AT AN INN

The Toff deceives the Priest into thinking he is dead

A NIGHT AT AN INN

First produced on May 13th, 1916, at
the Neighborhood Playhouse in New
York City. First published in Dunsany's
Plays of Gods and Men, 1917.

A Night at an Inn

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

A. E. SCOTT-FORTESCUE (<i>the Toff</i>)	} <i>a dilapidated gentleman.</i>
WILLIAM JONES (<i>Bill</i>)	
ALBERT THOMAS,	
JACOB SMITH (<i>Sniggers</i>)	
1ST PRIEST OF KLESH.	} <i>Merchant Sailors.</i>
2ND PRIEST OF KLESH.	
3RD PRIEST OF KLESH.	
KLESH.	

A Night at an Inn

The Curtain rises on a room in an inn.

[*Sniggers and Bill are talking. The Toff is reading a paper. Albert sits a little apart.*]

SNIGGERS.

What's his idea, I wonder ?

BILL.

I don't know.

SNIGGERS.

And how much longer will he keep us here ?

BILL.

We've been here three days.

SNIGGERS.

And 'aven't seen a soul.

BILL.

And a pretty penny it cost us when he rented
the 'pub.

A Night at an Inn

SNIGGERS.

'Ow long did 'e rent the 'pub for ?

BILL.

You never know with him.

SNIGGERS.

It's lonely enough.

BILL.

'Ow long did you rent the 'pub for, Toffy ?

[*The Toff continues to read a sporting paper; he takes no notice of what is said.*]

SNIGGERS.

'E's such a toff.

BILL.

Yet 'e's clever, no mistake.

SNIGGERS.

Those clever ones are the beggars to make a muddle. Their plans are clever enough, but they don't work, and then they make a mess of things much worse than you or me.

BILL.

Ah !

SNIGGERS.

I don't like this place.

A Night at an Inn

BILL.

Why not?

SNIGGERS.

I don't like the looks of it.

BILL.

He's keeping us here because here those niggers can't find us. The three heathen priests what was looking for us so. But we want to go and sell our ruby soon.

ALBERT.

There's no sense in it.

BILL.

Why not, Albert?

ALBERT.

Because I gave those black devils the slip in Hull.

BILL.

You give 'em the slip, Albert?

ALBERT.

The slip, all three of them. The fellows with the gold spots on their foreheads. I had the ruby then, and I give them the slip in Hull.

BILL.

How did you do it, Albert?

A Night at an Inn

ALBERT.

I had the ruby and they were following
me . . .

BILL.

Who told them you had the ruby ? You didn't
show it ?

ALBERT.

No . . . But they kind of know.

SNIGGERS.

They kind of know, Albert ?

ALBERT.

Yes, they know if you've got it. Well, they
sort of mouched after me, and I tells a policeman
and he says, O they were only three poor niggers
and they wouldn't hurt me. Ugh ! When I
thought of what they did in Malta to poor old
Jim.

BILL.

Yes, and to George in Bombay before we
started.

SNIGGERS.

Ugh !

A Night at an Inn

BILL.

Why didn't you give 'em in charge ?

ALBERT.

What about the ruby, Bill ?

BILL.

Ah !

ALBERT.

Well, I did better than that. I walks up and down through Hull. I walks slow enough. And then I turns a corner and I runs. I never sees a corner but I turns it. But sometimes I let a corner pass just to fool them. I twists about like a hare. Then I sits down and waits. No priests.

SNIGGERS.

What ?

ALBERT.

No heathen black devils with gold spots on their face. I give 'em the slip.

BILL.

Well done, Albert.

SNIGGERS.

[*After a sigh of content.*]

Why didn't you tell us ?

A Night at an Inn

ALBERT.

'Cause 'e won't let you speak. 'E's got 'is plans
and 'e thinks we're silly folk. Things must be
done 'is way. And all the time I've give 'em the
slip. Might 'ave 'ad one o' them crooked knives
in him before now but for me who give 'em the
slip in Hull.

BILL.

Well done, Albert.

SNIGGERS.

Do you hear that, Toffy? Albert has give
'em the slip.

THE TOFF.

Yes, I hear.

SNIGGERS.

Well, what do you say to that?

THE TOFF.

O . . . Well done, Albert.

ALBERT.

And what a' you going to do?

THE TOFF.

Going to wait.

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ALBERT.

Don't seem to know what 'e's waiting for.

SNIGGERS.

It's a nasty place.

ALBERT.

It's getting silly, Bill. Our money's gone and
we want to sell the ruby. Let's get on to a town.

BILL.

But 'e won't come.

ALBERT.

Then we'll leave him.

SNIGGERS.

We'll be all right if we keep away from Hull.

ALBERT.

We'll go to London.

BILL.

But 'e must 'ave 'is share.

SNIGGERS.

All right. Only let's go. [To the Toff.] We're
going, do you hear? Give us the ruby.

THE TOFF.

Certainly.

[He gives them a ruby from his waistcoat

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pocket: it is the size of a small hen's egg.]

[*He goes on reading his paper.*]

ALBERT.

Come on, Sniggers.

[*Exeunt Albert and Sniggers.*]

BILL.

Good-bye, old man. We'll give you your fair share, but there's nothing to do here, no girls, no halls, and we must sell the ruby.

THE TOFF.

I'm not a fool, Bill.

BILL.

No, no, of course not. Of course you ain't, and you've helped us a lot. Good-bye. You'll say good-bye?

THE TOFF.

Oh, yes. Good-bye.

[*Still reads paper. Exit Bill.*]

[*The Toff puts a revolver on the table beside him and goes on with his paper.*]

SNIGGERS.

[*Out of breath.*]

We've come back, Toffy.

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THE TOFF.

So you have.

ALBERT.

Toffy—how did they get here?

THE TOFF.

They walked, of course.

ALBERT.

But it's eighty miles.

SNIGGERS.

Did you know they were here, Toffy?

THE TOFF.

Expected them about now.

ALBERT.

Eighty miles.

BILL.

Toffy, old man—what are we to do?

THE TOFF.

Ask Albert.

BILL.

If they can do things like this there's no one
can save us but you, Toffy—I always knew you
were a clever one. We won't be fools any more.
We'll obey you, Toffy.

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THE TOFF.

You're brave enough and strong enough. There isn't many that would steal a ruby eye out of an idol's head, and such an idol as that was to look at, and on such a night. You're brave enough, Bill. But you're all three of you fools. Jim would have none of my plans and where's Jim? And George. What did they do to him?

SNIGGERS.

Don't, Toffy!

THE TOFF.

Well, then, your strength is no use to you. You want cleverness; or they'll have you the way that they had George and Jim.

ALL.

Ugh!

THE TOFF.

Those black priests would follow you round the world in circles, year after year, till they got the idol's eye. And if we died with it they'd follow our grandchildren. That fool thinks he can escape men like that by running round three streets in the town of Hull.

A Night at an Inn

ALBERT.

God's truth, *you* 'aven't escaped them, because
they're 'ere.

THE TOFF.

So I supposed.

ALBERT.

You supposed!

THE TOFF.

Yes, I believe there's no announcement in the Society papers. But I took this country seat especially to receive them. There's plenty of room if you dig; it is pleasantly situated and what is most important it is in a very quiet neighbourhood. So I am at home to them this afternoon.

BILL.

Well, you're a deep one.

THE TOFF.

And remember you've only my wits between you and death, and don't put your futile plans against those of an educated gentleman.

ALBERT.

If you're a gentleman, why don't you go about among gentlemen instead of the likes of us?

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THE TOFF.

Because I was too clever for them as I am too
clever for you.

ALBEET.

Too clever for them ?

THE TOFF.

I never lost a game of cards in my life.

BILL.

You never lost a game ?

THE TOFF.

Not when there was money on it.

BILL.

Well, well.

THE TOFF.

Have a game of poker ?

ALL.

No, thanks.

THE TOFF.

Then do as you're told.

BILL.

All right, Toffy.

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SNIGGERS.

I saw something just then. Hadn't we better draw the curtains?

THE TOFF.

No.

SNIGGERS.

What?

THE TOFF.

Don't draw the curtains.

SNIGGERS.

O all right.

BILL.

But Toffy, they can see us. One doesn't let the enemy do that. I don't see why . . .

THE TOFF.

No, of course you don't.

BILL.

O all right, Toffy.

[*All begin to pull out revolvers.*]

THE TOFF.

[*Putting his own away.*]

No revolvers, please.

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ALBERT.

Why not ?

THE TOFF.

Because I don't want any noise at my party.
We might get guests that hadn't been invited.
Knives are a different matter.

[*All draw knives. The Toff signs to them
not to draw them yet. Toffy has already taken back his ruby.*]

BILL.

I think they're coming, Toffy.

THE TOFF.

Not yet.

ALBERT.

When will they come ?

THE TOFF.

When I am quite ready to receive them. Not before.

SNIGGERS.

I should like to get this over.

THE TOFF.

Should you ? Then we'll have them now.

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SNIGGERS.

Now ?

THE TOFF.

Yes. Listen to me. You shall do as you see me do. You will all pretend to go out. I'll show you how. I've got the ruby. When they see me alone they will come for their idol's eye.

BILL.

How can they tell like this which of us has it ?

THE TOFF.

I confess I don't know, but they seem to.

SNIGGERS.

What will you do when they come in ?

THE TOFF.

I shall do nothing.

SNIGGERS.

What ?

THE TOFF.

They will creep up behind me. Then my friends, Sniggers and Bill and Albert, who gave them the slip, will do what they can.

BILL.

All right, Toffy. Trust us.

A Night at an Inn

THE TOFF.

If you're a little slow you will see enacted the cheerful spectacle that accompanied the demise of Jim.

SNIGGERS.

Don't, Toffy. We'll be there all right.

THE TOFF.

Very well. Now watch me.

[*He goes past the windows to the inner door R.; he opens it inwards. Then under cover of the open door he slips down on his knee and closes it, remaining on the inside, appearing to have gone out. He signs to the others who understand. Then he appears to reenter in the same manner.*]

Now, I shall sit with my back to the door. You go out one by one so far as our friends can make out. Crouch very low to be on the safe side. They mustn't see you through the window.

[*Bill makes his sham exit.*]

Remember, no revolvers. The police are, I believe, proverbially inquisitive.

[*The other two follow Bill. All three are now crouching inside the door R. The*

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Toff puts the ruby beside him on the table. He lights a cigarette.]

[The door in back opens so slowly that you can hardly say at what moment it began. The Toff picks up his paper.]

[A Native of India wriggles along the floor ever so slowly, seeking cover from chairs. He moves L. where the Toff is. The three sailors are R. Sniggers and Albert lean forward. Bill's arm keeps them back. An armchair had better conceal them from the Indian. The black Priest nears the Toff.]

[Bill watches to see if any more are coming. Then he leaps forward alone (he has taken his boots off) and knifes the Priest.]

[The Priest tries to shout but Bill's left hand is over his mouth.]

[The Toff continues to read his sporting paper. He never looks round.]

BILL.

[Sotto voce.]

There's only one, Toffy. What shall we do ?

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THE TOFF.

[Without turning his head.]

Only one?

BILL.

Yes.

THE TOFF.

Wait a moment. Let me think.

[Still apparently absorbed in his paper.]

Ah, yes. You go back, Bill. We must attract another guest. Now are you ready?

BILL.

Yes.

THE TOFF.

All right. You shall now see my demise at my Yorkshire residence. You must receive guests for me.

[He leaps up in full view of the window, flings up both arms and falls on to the floor near the dead Priest.]

Now be ready.

[His eyes close.]

[There is a long pause. Again the door opens, very very slowly. Another Priest creeps in. He has three golden spots upon his forehead. He looks round,

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then he creeps up to his companion and turns him over and looks inside each of his clenched hands. Then he looks at the recumbent Toff. Then he creeps towards him.]

[Bill slips after him and knifes him like the other with his left hand over his mouth.]

BILL.

[Sotto voce.]

We've only got two, Toffy.

THE TOFF.

Still another.

BILL.

What'll we do ?

THE TOFF.

[Sitting up.]

Hum.

BILL.

This is the best way, much.

THE TOFF.

Out of the question. Never play the same game twice.

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BILL.

Why not, Toffy?

THE TOFF.

Doesn't work if you do.

BILL.

Well?

THE TOFF.

I have it, Albert. You will now walk into the room. I showed you how to do it.

ALBERT.

Yes.

THE TOFF.

Just run over here and have a fight at this window with these two men.

ALBERT.

But they're —

THE TOFF.

Yes, they're dead, my perspicuous Albert. But Bill and I are going to resuscitate them — Come on.

[Bill picks up a body under the arms.]

That's right, Bill. [Does the same.] Come and help us, Sniggers. [Sniggers comes.] Keep low,

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keep low. Wave their arms about, Sniggers. Don't show yourself. Now, Albert, over you go. Our Albert is slain. Back you get, Bill. Back, Sniggers. Still, Albert. Mustn't move when he comes. Not a muscle.

[A face appears at the window and stays for some time. Then the door opens and looking craftily round the third Priest enters. He looks at his companions' bodies and turns round. He suspects something. He takes up one of the knives and with a knife in each hand he puts his back to the wall. He looks to the left and right.]

Come on, Bill.

[The Priest rushes to the door. The Toff knifes the last Priest from behind.]

A good day's work, my friends.

BILL.

Well done, Toffy. Oh, you are a deep one.

ALBERT.

A deep one if ever there was one.

SNIGGERS.

There ain't any more, Bill, are there ?

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THE TOFF.

No more in the world, my friend.

BILL.

Aye, that's all there are. There were only three in the temple. Three priests and their beastly idol.

ALBERT.

What is it worth, Toffy? Is it worth a thousand pounds?

THE TOFF.

It's worth all they've got in the shop. Worth just whatever we like to ask for it.

ALBERT.

Then we're millionaires, now.

THE TOFF.

Yes, and what is more important, we no longer have any heirs.

BILL.

We'll have to sell it now.

ALBERT.

That won't be easy. It's a pity it isn't small and we had half a dozen. Hadn't the idol any other on him?

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BILL.

No, he was green jade all over and only had this one eye. He had it in the middle of his forehead, and was a long sight uglier than anything else in the world.

SNIGGERS.

I'm sure we ought all to be very grateful to Toffy.

BILL.

And indeed we ought.

ALBERT.

If it hadn't 'ave been for him —

BILL.

Yes, if it hadn't 'a' been for old Toffy . . .

SNIGGERS.

He's a deep one.

THE TOFF.

Well, you see, I just have a knack of foreseeing things.

SNIGGERS.

I should think you did.

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BILL.

Why, I don't suppose anything happens that our Toff doesn't foresee. Does it, Toffy?

THE TOFF.

Well, I don't think it does, Bill. I don't think it often does.

BILL.

Life is no more than just a game of cards to our old Toff.

THE TOFF.

Well, we've taken these fellows' trick.

SNIGGERS.

[*Going to the window.*]

It wouldn't do for any one to see them.

THE TOFF.

O nobody will come this way. We're all alone on a moor.

BILL.

Where will we put them?

THE TOFF.

Bury them in the cellar, but there's no hurry.

BILL.

And what then, Toffy?

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THE TOFF.

Why, then we'll go to London and upset the ruby business. We have really come through this job very nicely.

BILL.

I think the first thing that we ought to do is to give a little supper to old Toffy. We'll bury these fellows to-night.

ALBERT.

Yes, let's.

SNIGGERS.

The very thing.

BILL.

And we'll all drink his health.

ALBERT.

Good old Toffy.

SNIGGERS.

He ought to have been a general or a premier.

[They get bottles from cupboard, etc.]

THE TOFF.

Well, we've earned our bit of a supper.

[They sit down.]

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BILL.

[*Glass in hand.*]

Here's to old Toffy who guessed everything.

ALBERT AND SNIGGERS.

Good old Toffy.

BILL.

Toffy who saved our lives and made our fortunes.

ALBERT AND SNIGGERS.

Hear. Hear.

THE TOFF.

And here's to Bill who saved me twice to-night.

BILL.

Couldn't have done it but for your cleverness, Toffy.

SNIGGERS.

Hear, hear. Hear, hear.

ALBERT.

He foresees everything.

BILL.

A speech, Toffy. A speech from our general.

ALL.

Yes, a speech.

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SNIGGERS.

A speech.

THE TOFF.

Well, get me some water. This whiskey's too much for my head, and I must keep it clear till our friends are safe in the cellar.

BILL.

Water. Yes, of course. Get him some water, Sniggers.

SNIGGERS.

We don't use water here. Where shall I get it?

BILL.

Outside in the garden.

[*Exit Sniggers.*]

ALBERT.

Here's to fortune.

BILL.

Here's to Albert Thomas Esquire.

ALBERT.

And William Jones Esquire.

[*Re-enter Sniggers terrified.*]

THE TOFF.

Hullo, here's Jacob Smith Esquire, J. P., alias Sniggers, back again.

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SNIGGERS.

Toffy, I've been a thinking about my share in
that ruby. I don't want it, Toffy, I don't want it.

THE TOFF.

Nonsense, Sniggers, nonsense.

SNIGGERS.

You shall have it, Toffy, you shall have it your-
self, only say Sniggers has no share in this 'ere
ruby. Say it, Toffy, say it.

BILL.

Want to turn informer, Sniggers ?

SNIGGERS.

No, no. Only I don't want the ruby, Toffy . . .

THE TOFF.

No more nonsense, Sniggers ; we're all in to-
gether in this. If one hangs we all hang ; but
they won't outwit me. Besides, it's not a hanging
affair ; they had their knives.

SNIGGERS.

Toffy, Toffy, I always treated you fair, Toffy.
I was always one to say, Give Toffy a chance.
Take back my share, Toffy.

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THE TOFF.

What's the matter? What are you driving at?

SNIGGERS.

Take it back, Toffy.

THE TOFF.

Answer me; what are you up to?

SNIGGERS.

I don't want my share any more.

BILL.

Have you seen the police?

[Albert pulls out his knife.]

THE TOFF.

No, no knives, Albert.

ALBERT.

What then?

THE TOFF.

The honest truth in open court, barring the
ruby. We were attacked.

SNIGGERS.

There's no police.

THE TOFF.

Well, then, what's the matter?

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BILL.

Out with it.

SNIGGERS.

I swear to God . . .

ALBERT.

Well ?

THE TOFF.

Don't interrupt.

SNIGGERS.

I swear I saw something *what I didn't like.*

THE TOFF.

What you didn't like ?

SNIGGERS.

[*In tears.*]

O Toffy, Toffy, take it back. Take my share.
Say you take it.

THE TOFF.

What has he seen ?

[*Dead silence only broken by Sniggers' sobs.*
Then stony steps are heard.]

[*Enter a hideous Idol. It is blind and gropes its way. It gropes its way to the ruby and picks it up and screws it into a socket in the forehead.*]

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[*Sniggers still weeps softly; the rest stare in horror. The Idol steps out, not groping. Its steps move off then stops.*]

O great heavens!

ALBERT.

[*In a childish, plaintive voice.*]

What is it, Toffy?

BILL.

Albert, it is that obscene idol [*in a whisper*] come from India.

ALBERT.

It is gone.

BILL.

It has taken its eye.

SNIGGERS.

We are saved.

OFF, A VOICE.

[*With outlandish accent.*]

Meestaire William Jones, Able Seaman.

[*The Toff has never spoken, never moved. He only gazes stupidly in horror.*]

BILL.

Albert, Albert, what is this?

[*He rises and walks out. One moan is*

A Night at an Inn

heard. Sniggers goes to window. He falls back sickly.]

ALBERT.

[In a whisper.]

What has happened ?

SNIGGERS.

I have seen it. I have seen it. O I have seen it.

[He returns to table.]

THE TOFF.

[Laying his hand very gently on Sniggers' arm, speaking softly and winningly.]

What was it, Sniggers ?

SNIGGERS.

I have seen it.

ALBERT.

What ?

SNIGGERS.

O !

VOICE.

Meestaire Albert Thomas, Able Seaman.

ALBERT.

Must I go, Toffy ? Toffy, must I go ?

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SNIGGERS.

[*Clutching him.*]

Don't move.

ALBERT.

[*Going.*]

Toffy, Toffy.

[*Exit.*]

VOICE.

Meestaire Jacob Smith, Able Seaman.

SNIGGERS.

I can't go, Toffy. I can't go. I can't do it.

[*He goes.*]

VOICE.

Meestaire Arnold Everett Scott-Fortescue, late
Esquire, Able Seaman.

THE TOFF.

I did not foresee it.

[*Exit.*]

CURTAIN.



Photo by P. O. Valentine. Courtesy of Neighborhood Playhouse

THE QUEEN'S ENEMIES
The Queen welcomes her guests

THE QUEEN'S ENEMIES

First produced on November 14th,
1916, at the Neighborhood Playhouse
in New York City. First published in
Dunsany's *Plays of Gods and Men*,
1917.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE QUEEN.

ACKAZÁRPSÉS, *her handmaid.*

PRINCE RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

PRINCE ZOPHÉRNES.

THE PRIEST OF HORUS.

THE KING OF THE FOUR COUNTRIES.

THE TWIN DUKES OF ETHIOPIA.

THARNI
THÁRRABAS
HARLEE

} *Slaves.*

SLAVES.

SCENE:—*An underground temple in Egypt.*

TIME:—*The Sixth Dynasty.*

The Queen's Enemies

[*The stage is in two parts. Right—a staircase descending to a door. Left—an underground temple into which the door opens.*]

[*The Curtain rises on darkness in both parts of the stage.*]

[*Two Slaves appear with tapers on the steps. As they go down the steps, they light the torches that are clamped against the wall, with their tapers. Afterwards when they come to the temple they light the torches there till they are all lit. There is a table prepared for a banquet in the temple and a sewer-like grating in the middle of a wall. The two Slaves are Tharni and Thárrabas.*]

THÁRRABAS.

Is it much further, Tharni?

The Queen's Enemies

THARNI.

I think not, Thárrabas.

THÁRRABAS.

A dank and terrible place.

THARNI.

It is not much further.

THÁRRABAS.

Why does the Queen banquet in so fearful a place?

THARNI.

I know not. She banquets with her enemies.

THÁRRABAS.

In the land from which I was taken we do not banquet with our enemies.

THARNI.

No? The Queen will banquet with her enemies.

THÁRRABAS.

Why? Know you why?

THARNI.

It is the way of the Queen.

[*Silence.*]

THÁRRABAS.

The door, Tharni, we have come to the door!

The Queen's Enemies

THARNI.

Yes, that's the Temple.

THÁRRABAS.

Surely a grim place.

THARNI.

The banquet is prepared. We light these
torches, that is all.

THÁRRABAS.

Unto whom is it holy?

THARNI.

They say to the Nile once. I know not unto
whom it is holy now.

THÁRRABAS.

So Nile has left it?

THARNI.

They say they worship him in this place no
longer.

THÁRRABAS.

And if I were holy Nile I also would stay up
there [*pointing*] in the sunlight.

[*He suddenly sees the huge misshapen bulk
of Harlee.*]

O—O—O.

The Queen's Enemies

HARLEE.

Urh !

THARNI.

Why, it's Harlee.

THÁRRABAS.

I thought you were some fearful, evil god.

[*Harlee laughs. He remains leaning on his great iron bar.*]

THARNI.

He waits here for the Queen.

THÁRRABAS.

What sinister need could she have of Harlee ?

THARNI.

I know not. You wait for the Queen, Harlee ?

[*Harlee nods.*]

THÁRRABAS.

I would not banquet here. Not with a Queen.

[*Harlee laughs long.*]

Our work is done. Come. Let us leave this place.

[*Exeunt Thárrabas and Tharni up the steps.*]

[*The Queen appears with her handmaid, Ackazárpses, coming down the steps*

The Queen's Enemies

Her handmaid holds her train. They enter the temple.]

QUEEN.

Ah, all is ready.

ACKAZÁRPSES.

No, no, Illustrious Lady. Nothing is ready.
Your raiment—we must fasten it here [*shoulder*],
and then the bow in your hair.

[*She begins to tittivate the Queen.*]

QUEEN.

Ackazárpse, Ackazárpse. I cannot bear to have
enemies.

ACKAZÁRPSES.

Indeed, Illustrious Lady, it is most wrong that
you should have enemies. One so delicate, so
slender and withal so beautiful should never have
a foe.

QUEEN.

If the gods could understand they would never
permit it.

ACKAZÁRPSES.

I have poured out dark wine to them, I have
offered them fat, indeed, I have often offered them
savoury things. I have said: "The Queen should

The Queen's Enemies

not have enemies ; she is too delicate, too fair."
But they will not understand.

QUEEN.

If they could see my tears they would never permit such woes to be borne by one small woman. But they only look at men and their horrible wars. Why must men slay one another and make horrible war ?

ACKAZÁRPSES.

I blame your enemies, Illustrious Lady, more than the gods. Why should they trouble you who are so fair and so easily hurt by their anger ? It was but a little territory you took from them. How much better to lose a little territory than to be unmannerly and unkind.

QUEEN.

O speak not of the territory. I know naught of these things. They say my captains took it. How should I know ? O why will they be my enemies ?

ACKAZÁRPSES.

You are most fair to-night, Illustrious Lady.

QUEEN.

I must needs be fair to-night.

The Queen's Enemies

ACKAZÁRPSSES.

Indeed you are most fair.

QUEEN.

A little more perfume, Ackazárpses.

ACKAZÁRPSSES.

I will tie the coloured bow more evenly.

QUEEN.

O they will never look at it. They will not know if it is orange or blue. I shall weep if they do not look at it. It is a pretty bow.

ACKAZÁRPSSES.

Calm yourself, lady ! They will be here soon.

QUEEN.

Indeed I think they are very close to me now, for I feel myself trembling.

ACKAZÁRPSSES.

You must not tremble, Illustrious Lady ; you must not tremble.

QUEEN.

They are such terrible men, Ackazárpses.

ACKAZÁRPSSES.

But you must not tremble, for your raiment is now perfect; yet if you tremble, alas ! who may say how it will hang ?

The Queen's Enemies

QUEEN.

They are such huge, terrible men.

ACKAZÁRPSES.

O the raiment, the raiment; you must not, you
must not!

QUEEN.

O I cannot bear it. I cannot bear it. There is
Rhádamandáspes, that huge, fierce soldier, and the
terrible Priest of Horus, and . . . and . . .
O I cannot see them, I cannot see them.

ACKAZÁRPSES.

Lady, you have invited them.

QUEEN.

O say I am ill, say I am sick of a fever. Quick,
quick, say I have some swift fever and cannot see
them.

ACKAZÁRPSES.

Illustrious Lady . . .

QUEEN.

Quick, for I cannot bear it.

[*Exit Ackazárpes.*]

O, I cannot bear to have enemies.

The Queen's Enemies

AOKAZÁRPSSES.

[*Returning.*]

Lady, they are here.

QUEEN.

O what shall we do? . . . Set this bow
higher upon my head so that it must be seen.

[*Ackazáirpses does so.*]

The pretty bow.

[*She continues to look in a hand mirror.*

*A slave descends the stairs. Then Rhá-
damandáspes and Zophérnes. Rhá-
damandáspes and Zophérnes stop; the
slave stops lower down.*]

ZOPHÉRNES.

For the last time, Rhádamandáspes, consider.
Even yet we may turn back.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

She had no guards outside nor was there any
hiding place for them. There was the empty
plain and the Nile only.

ZOPHÉRNES.

Who knows what she may have in this dark
temple?

The Queen's Enemies

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

It is small and the stairway narrow ; our friends are close behind us. We could hold these steps with our swords against all her men.

ZOPHÉRNES.

True. They are narrow steps. Yet . . . Rhádamandáspes, I do not fear man or god or even woman, yet when I saw the letter this woman sent bidding us banquet with her I felt that it was not well that we should come.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

She said that she would love us though we were her enemies.

ZOPHÉRNES.

It is not natural to love one's enemies.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

She is much swayed by whims. They sway her as the winds in Spring sway flowers—this way and that. This is one of her whims.

ZOPHÉRNES.

I do not trust her whims.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

They name you Zophérnes, giver of good counsel, therefore I will turn back because you counsel

The Queen's Enemies

it, though I would fain go down and banquet
with this little playful lady.

[*They turn and mount.*]

ZOPHÉRNES.

Believe me, Rhádamandáspes, it is better. I
think that if you had gone down these steps we
scarcely should have seen the sky again.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

Well, well, we turn back, though I would fain
have humoured the Queen's whim. But look.
The others come. We cannot turn back. There
comes the Priest of Horus; we must go to the
banquet now.

ZOPHÉRNES.

So be it.

[*They descend.*]

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

We will be circumspect. If she has men in
there we return at once.

ZOPHÉRNES.

So be it.

[*The Slave opens the door.*]

SLAVE.

The Princes Rhádamandáspes and Zophérnes.

The Queen's Enemies

QUEEN.

Welcome, Illustrious Princes.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

Greeting.

QUEEN.

O you have brought your sword !

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

I have brought my sword.

QUEEN.

O but it is so terrible, your great sword.

ZOPHÉRNES.

We always carry our swords.

QUEEN.

O but you do not need them. If you have
come to kill me your great hands are enough.
But why do you bring your swords ?

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

Illustrious Lady, we do not come to kill you.

QUEEN.

To your post, Harlee.

ZOPHÉRNES.

What are this Harlee and his post ?

The Queen's Enemies

AOKAZÁRPSÉS.

Do not tremble, Illustrious Lady, indeed you must not tremble.

QUEEN.

He is but a fisherman; he lives upon the Nile.
He nets fish; indeed he is nothing.

ZOPHÉRNÉS.

For what is your great bar of iron, Slave?

[*Harlee opens his mouth showing that he is tongueless.* *Exit.*]

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

Ugh! They have burned out his tongue.

ZOPHÉRNÉS.

He goes on secret errands.

[*Enter Second Slave.*]

SECOND SLAVE.

The Priest of Horus.

QUEEN.

Welcome, holy companion of the gods.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

Greeting.

THIRD SLAVE.

The King of the Four Countries.

[*She and he make obeisance.*]

The Queen's Enemies

FOURETH SLAVE.

The Twin Dukes of Ethiopia.

KING.

We are all met.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

All that have warred against her captains.

QUEEN.

O speak not of my captains. It troubles me to hear of violent men. But you have been my enemies, and I cannot bear to have enemies. Therefore I have asked you to banquet with me.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

And we have come.

QUEEN.

O look not so sternly at me. I cannot bear to have enemies. When I have enemies I do not sleep. Is it not so, Ackazárpses?

ACKAZÁRPSES.

Indeed, the Illustrious Lady has suffered much.

QUEEN.

O Ackazárpses, why should I have enemies?

ACKAZÁRPSES.

After to-night you will sleep, Illustrious Lady.

The Queen's Enemies

QUEEN.

Why, yes, for we shall all be friends; shall we not, princes? Let us be seated.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

[*To Zophérnes.*]

There is no other doorway. That is well.

ZOPHÉRNES.

Why, no, there is not. Yet what is that great hole that is full of darkness?

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

Only one man at a time could come that way. We are safe from man or beast. Nothing could enter that way for our swords.

QUEEN.

I pray you to be seated.

[*They seat themselves cautiously, she standing watching them.*]

ZOPHÉRNES.

There are no servitors.

QUEEN.

Are there not viands before you, Prince Zophérnes, or are there too few fruits that you should blame me?

The Queen's Enemies

ZOPHÉRNES.

I do not blame you.

QUEEN.

I fear you blame me with your fierce eyes.

ZOPHÉRNES.

I do not blame you.

QUEEN.

O my enemies, I would have you kind to me.
And indeed there are no servitors, for I know
what evil things you think of me . . .

A DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

No, Queen, indeed we think no evil of you.

QUEEN.

Ah, but you think terrible things.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

We think no evil of you, Illustrious Lady.

QUEEN.

I feared that if I had servitors you would
think . . . you would say, "This wicked
Queen, our enemy, will bid them attack us while
we feast."

[*First Duke of Ethiopia furtively hands
food to his Slave standing behind him,
who tastes it.*]

The Queen's Enemies

Though you do not know how I dread the sight
of blood, and indeed I would never bid them do
such a thing. The sight of blood is shocking.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

We trust you, Illustrious Lady.

[*He does the same with his Slave.*]

QUEEN.

And for miles round this temple and all along
the river I have said, "Let there be no man." I
have commanded and there are not. Will you
not trust me now?

[*Zophérnes does the same and all the guests,
one by one.*]

PRIEST OF HORUS.

Indeed, we trust you.

QUEEN.

And you, Prince Zophérnes, with your fierce
eyes that so frighten me—will you not trust me?

ZOPHÉRNES.

O Queen, it is part of the art of war to be well
prepared when in an enemy's country, and we
have been so long at war with your captains that
we perforce remember some of the art. It is not
that we do not trust you.

The Queen's Enemies

QUEEN.

I am all alone with my handmaid and none will trust me! O Ackazárpses, I am frightened; what if my enemies should slay me and carry me up, and cast my body into the lonely Nile.

ACKAZÁRPSSES.

No, no, Illustrious Lady. They will not harm you. They do not know how their fierce looks distress you. They do not know how delicate you are.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

[*To Ackazárpses.*]

Indeed we trust the Queen and none would harm her.

[*Ackazárpses soothes the Queen.*]

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

[*To Zophérnes.*]

I think we do wrong to doubt her, seeing she is alone.

ZOPHÉRNES.

[*To Rhádamandáspe.*]

Yet I would that the banquet were over.

QUEEN.

[*To Ackazárpses and the Priest of Horus,
but audible to all.*]

The Queen's Enemies

Yet they do not eat the food that I set before them.

DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

In Ethiopia when we feast with queens it is our custom not to eat at once but to await the Queen till she has eaten.

QUEEN.

[*Eats.*]

Behold then, I have eaten.

[*She looks at Priest of Horus.*]

PRIEST OF HORUS.

It has been the custom of all that held my office, from the time when there went on earth the children of the Moon, never to eat till the food is dedicate, by our sacred signs, to the gods.

[*He begins to wave his hands over the food.*]

QUEEN.

The King of the Four Countries does not eat. And you, Prince Rhádamandáspes, you have given royal wine unto your slave.

RHADAMANDASPES.

O Queen, it is the custom of our dynasty . . . and has indeed long been so, . . . as many say, . . . that the noble should not feast till

The Queen's Enemies

the base have feasted, reminding us that our bodies even as the humble bodies of the base . . .

QUEEN.

Why do you thus watch your slave, Prince Rhádamandáspes?

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

Even to remind myself that I have done as our dynasty doth.

QUEEN.

Alas for me, Ackazárpses, they will not feast with me, but mock me because I am little and alone. O I shall not sleep to-night, I shall not sleep.

[*She weeps.*]

ACKAZÁRPSSES.

Yes, yes, Illustrious Lady, you shall sleep. Be patient and all shall be well and you will sleep.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

But Queen, Queen, we are about to eat.

DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

Yes, yes, indeed we do not mock you.

KING OF FOUR COUNTRIES.

We do not mock you, Queen.

The Queen's Enemies

QUEEN.

They . . . give my food to slaves.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

That was a mistake.

QUEEN.

It was . . . no mistake.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

The slaves were hungry.

QUEEN.

[*Still weeping.*]

They believe I would poison them.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

No, no, Illustrious Lady, they do not believe
that.

QUEEN.

They believe I would poison them.

ACKAZÁRPSÉS.

[*Comforting her.*]

O hush, hush. They do not mean to be so
cruel.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

They do not believe you would poison them.
But they do not know if the meat was killed with
a poisonous arrow or if an asp may have inadvert-

The Queen's Enemies

ently bitten the fruit. These things may happen, but they do not believe you would poison them.

QUEEN.

They believe I would poison them.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

No ; Queen, see, we eat.

[*They hastily whisper to slaves.*]

FIRST DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

We eat your viands, Queen.

SECOND DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

We drink your wine.

KING OF FOUR COUNTRIES.

We eat your good pomegranates and Egyptian grapes.

ZOPHÉRNES.

We eat.

[*They all eat.*]

PRIEST OF HORUS.

[*Smiling affably.*]

I too eat of your excellent banquet, O Queen.

[*He peels a fruit slowly, glancing constantly at the others.*]

The Queen's Enemies

[Meanwhile the catches in the Queen's breath
grow fewer, she begins to dry her eyes.]

ACKAZÁRPSES.

[In her ear.]

They eat.

[Ackazárpses lifts her head and
watches them.]

QUEEN.

Perhaps the wine is poisoned.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

No, no, Illustrious Lady.

QUEEN.

Perhaps the grape was cut by a poisoned arrow.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

But indeed . . . indeed . . .

[Queen drinks from his cup.]

QUEEN.

Will you not drink my wine ?

PRIEST OF HORUS.

I drink to our continued friendship.

[He drinks.]

A DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

Our continued friendship !

The Queen's Enemies

PRIEST OF HORUS.

There has been no true enmity. We misunderstood the Queen's armies.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

[*To Zophérnes.*]

We have wronged the Queen. The wine's not poisoned. Let us drink to her.

ZOPHÉRNES.

So be it.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

We drink to you, Queen.

ZOPHÉRNES.

We drink.

QUEEN.

The flagon, Ackazárpses.

[*Ackazárpses brings it. The Queen pours it into her cup.*]

Fill up your goblets from the flagon, princes.

[*She drinks.*]

RHADÁMANDÁSPES.

We wronged you, Queen. It is a blessed wine.

QUEEN.

It is an ancient wine and grew in Lesbos, looking from Mytelenë to the South. Ships brought

The Queen's Enemies

it over-seas and up this river to gladden the hearts
of man in holy Egypt. But to me it brings no
joy.

DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

It is a happy wine, Queen.

QUEEN.

I have been thought a poisoner.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

Indeed, none has thought that, Illustrious Lady.

QUEEN.

You have all thought it.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

We ask your pardon, Queen.

KING OF FOUR COUNTRIES.

We ask your pardon.

DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

Indeed we erred.

ZOPHÉRNES.

[*Rising.*]

We have eaten your fruits and drunk your
wine ; and we have asked your pardon. Let us
now depart in amity.

The Queen's Enemies

QUEEN.

No, no! No, no! You must not go! I shall say . . . “They are my enemies still,” and I shall not sleep. I that cannot bear to have enemies.

ZOPHÉRNES.

Let us depart in all amity.

QUEEN.

O will you not feast with me?

ZOPHÉRNES.

We have feasted.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

No, no, Zophérnes. Do you not see? The Queen takes it to heart.

[*Zophérnes sits down.*]

QUEEN.

O feast with me a little longer and make merry, and be my enemies no more. Rhádamandáspes, there is some country eastwards towards Assyria, is there not?—I do not know its name—a country which your dynasty claims of me . . .

ZOPHÉRNES.

Ha!

The Queen's Enemies

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

[*Resignedly.*]

We have lost it.

QUEEN.

. . . and for whose sake you are my enemy
and your fierce uncle, Prince Zophérnes.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

We fought somewhat with your armies, Queen.
But indeed it was but to practise the military art.

QUEEN.

I will call my captains to me. I will call them
down from their high places and reprove them
and bid them give the country back to you that
lies eastwards towards Assyria. Only you shall
tarry here at the feast and forget you ever were
my enemies . . . forget . . .

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

Queen . . . ! Queen . . . ! It was
my mother's country as a child . . .

QUEEN.

You will not leave me alone then here to-night.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

No, most royal lady.

The Queen's Enemies

QUEEN.

[*To King of Four Countries who appears about to depart.*]

And in the matter of the merchant men that trade amongst the isles, they shall offer spices at *your* feet, not at mine, and the men of the isles shall offer goats to *your* gods.

KING OF FOUR COUNTRIES.

Most generous Queen . . . indeed . . .

QUEEN.

But you will not leave my banquet and go unfriendly away.

KING OF FOUR COUNTRIES.

No, Queen . . .

[*He drinks.*]

QUEEN.

[*She looks at the Two Dukes amiably.*]

All Ethiopia shall be yours, down to the unknown kingdoms of the beasts.

FIRST DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

Queen.

SECOND DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

Queen. We drink to the glory of your throne.

The Queen's Enemies

QUEEN.

Stay then and feast with me. For not to have enemies is the beggar's joy ; and I have looked from windows long and long, envying those that go their ways in rags. Stay with me, dukes and princes.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

Illustrious Lady, the generosity of your royal heart has given the gods much joy.

QUEEN.

[*Smiles at him.*]

Thank you.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

Er . . . in the matter of the tribute due to Horus from all the people of Egypt . . .

QUEEN.

It is yours.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

Illustrious Lady.

QUEEN.

I will take none of it. Use it how you will.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

The gratitude of Horus shall shine on you. My little Ackazárpses, how happy you are in having so royal a mistress.

The Queen's Enemies

[*His arm is round Ackazárpses' waist;
Ackazárpses smiles at him.*]

QUEEN.

[*Rising.*]

Princes and gentlemen, let us drink to the
future.

PRIEST OF HORUS.

[*Starting suddenly.*]

Ah-h-h !

QUEEN.

Something has troubled you, holy companion of
the gods ?

PRIEST OF HORUS.

No, nothing. Sometimes the spirit of prophecy
comes on me. It comes not often. It seemed to
come then. I thought that one of the gods spoke
to me clearly.

QUEEN.

What said he ?

PRIEST OF HORUS.

I thought he said . . . speaking here [*right
ear*] or just behind me . . . Drink not to the
Future. But it was nothing.

QUEEN.

Will you drink then to the past ?

The Queen's Enemies

PRIEST OF HORUS.

O no, Illustrious Lady, for we forget the past ;
your good wine has made us forget the past and
its quarrels.

ACKAZÁRPSSES.

Will you not drink to the present ?

PRIEST OF HORUS.

Ah, the present ! The present that places me
by so lovely a lady. I drink to the present.

QUEEN.

[*To the others.*]

And we, we will drink to the future, and to
forgetting—to the forgetting of our enemies.

[*All drink ; good temper comes on all.
The banquet begins "to go well."*]

QUEEN.

Ackazárpses, they are all merry now.

ACKAZÁRPSSES.

They are all merry.

QUEEN.

They are telling Ethiopian tales.

FIRST DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

. . . for when Winter comes the pygmies at
once put themselves in readiness for war and hav-

The Queen's Enemies

ing chosen a place for battle wait there for some days, so that the cranes when they arrive find their enemy already arrayed. And at first they preen themselves and do not give battle, but when they are fully rested after their great journey they attack the pygmies with indescribable fury so that many are slain, but the pygmies . . .

QUEEN.

[*Taking her by wrist.*]

Ackazárpses!

[*The Queen rises.*]

ZOPHÉRNES.

Queen, you do not leave us ?

QUEEN.

For a little while, Prince Zophérnes.

ZOPHÉRNES.

For what purpose ?

QUEEN.

I go to pray to a very secret god.

ZOPHÉRNES.

What is his name ?

QUEEN.

His name is secret like his deeds.

The Queen's Enemies

[*She goes to door. Silence falls. All watch her. She and Ackazárpses slip out. For a moment silence. Then all draw their wide swords and lay them before them on the table.*]

ZOPHÉRNES.

To the door, slaves. Let no man enter.

FIRST DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

She cannot mean harm to us!

[*A Slave comes back from door and abases himself. Log.*]

SLAVE.

The door is bolted.

RHÁDAMANDÁSPES.

It is easily broken with our swords.

ZOPHÉRNES.

No harm can come to us while we guard the entrances.

[*Meanwhile the Queen has gone up the stairs. She beats with a fan on the wall thrice. The great grating lifts outwards and upwards very slowly.*]

The Queen's Enemies

ZOPHÉRNES.

[*To the Two Dukes.*]

Quick, to the great hole.

[*They go.*]

Stand on each side of it with your swords.

[*They lift their swords over the hole.*]

Slay whatever enters.

QUEEN.

[*On the step, kneeling, her two arms stretched upwards.*]

O holy Nile! Ancient Egyptian river! O blessed Nile! When I was a little child I played beside you, picking mauve flowers. I threw you down the sweet Egyptian flowers. It is the little Queen that calls to you, Nile. The little Queen that cannot bear to have enemies. Hear me, O Nile.

Men speak of other rivers. But I do not hearken to fools. There is only Nile. It is the little child that prays to you who used to pick mauve flowers. Hear me, O Nile.

I have prepared a sacrifice to god. Men speak of other gods: there is only Nile. I have prepared a sacrifice of wine—the Lesbian wine from fairy Mitylenë—to mingle with your waters till you are

The Queen's Enemies

drunken and go singing to the sea from the Abyssinian hills. O Nile, hear me.

Fruits also have I made ready, all the sweet juices of the earth; and the meat of beasts also.

Hear me, O Nile: for it is not the meat of beasts only. I have slaves for you and princes and a King. There has been no such sacrifice.

Come down, O Nile, from the sunlight.

O ancient Egyptian river! The sacrifice is ready.

O Nile, hear me.

DUKE OF ETHIOPIA.

No one comes.

QUEEN.

[Beats again with her fan.]

Harlee, Harlee, let in the water upon the princes and gentlemen.

[*A green torrent descends from the great hole. Green gauzes rise up from the floor; the torches hiss out. The temple is flooded. The water from under the doors rises up the steps; the torches hiss out one by one. The water, finding its own level, just touches the end of the Queen's skirt and stops. She withdraws*

The Queen's Enemies

the skirt with catlike haste from the water.]

O Ackazárpses! Are all my enemies gone?

ACKAZÁRPSSES.

Illustrious Lady, the Nile has taken them all.

QUEEN.

[With intense devotion.]

That holy river.

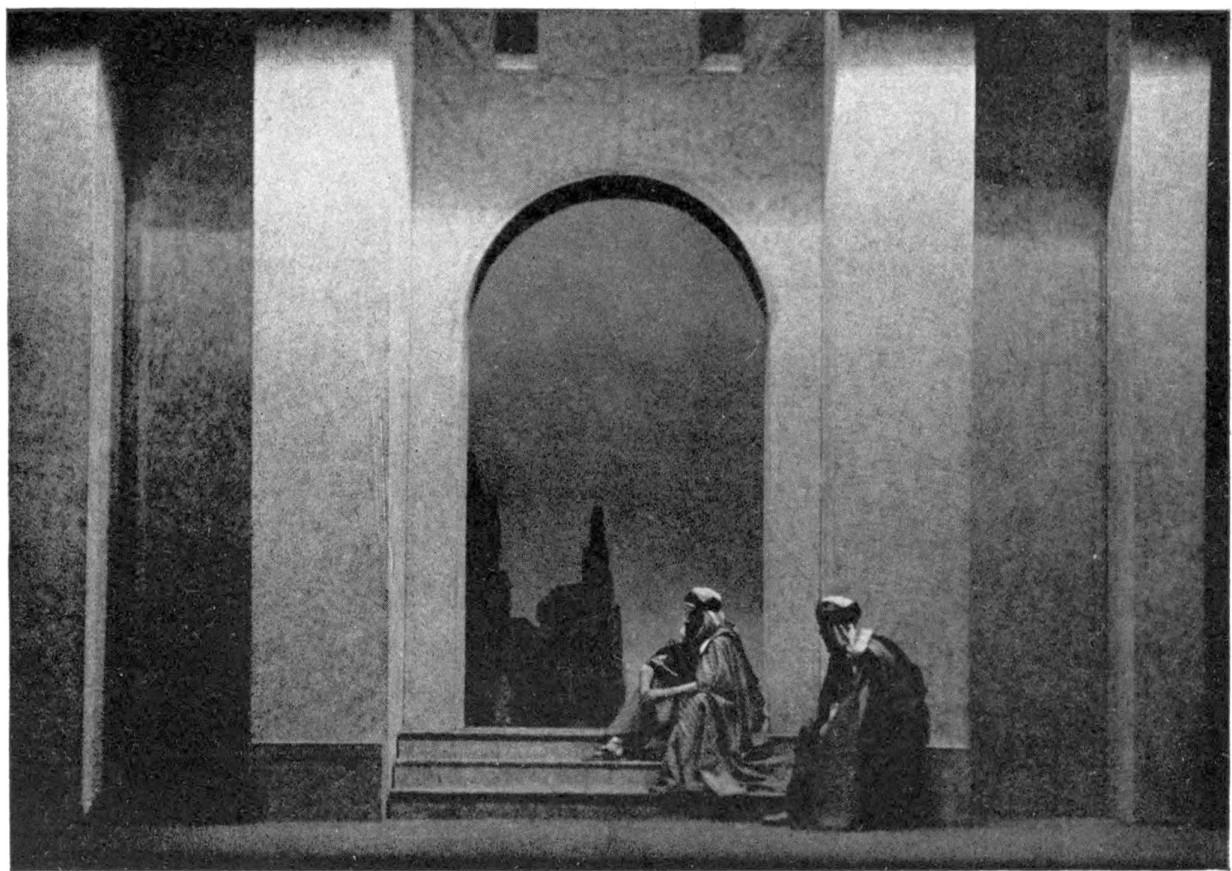
ACKAZÁRPSSES.

Illustrious Lady, you will sleep to-night?

QUEEN.

Yes. I shall sleep sweetly.

CURTAIN.



THE TENTS OF THE ARABS

THE TENTS OF THE ARABS

First produced on August 14th, 1913,
at the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester,
England, directed by B. Iden Payne.
First published in Dunsany's *Five Plays*,
1911.

The Tents of the Arabs

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE KING.

BEL-NARB }
AOOB } camel-drivers.

THE CHAMBERLAIN.

ZABRA, *a notable.*

EZNARZA, *a gypsy of the desert.*

SCENE:—*Outside the gate of the city
of Thalanna.*

TIME:—*Uncertain.*

The Tents of the Arabs

ACT I.

Outside the gate of the city of Thalanna.

BEL-NARB.

By evening we shall be in the desert again.

AOOB.

Yes.

BEL-NARB.

Then no more city for us for many weeks.

AOOB.

Ah !

BEL-NARB.

We shall see the lights come out, looking back
from the camel-track ; that is the last we shall see
of it.

AOOB.

We shall be in the desert then.

The Tents of the Arabs

BEL-NARB.

The old angry desert.

AOOB.

How cunningly the desert hides his wells. You would say he had an enmity with man. He does not welcome you as the cities do.

BEL-NARB.

He *has* an enmity. I hate the desert.

AOOB.

I think there is nothing in the world so beautiful as cities.

BEL-NARB.

Cities are beautiful things.

AOOB.

I think they are loveliest a little after dawn when night falls off from the houses. They draw it away from them slowly and let it fall like a cloak and stand quite naked in their beauty to shine in some broad river; and the light comes up and kisses them on the forehead. I think they are loveliest then. The voices of men and women begin to arise in the streets, scarce audible, one by one, till a slow loud murmur arises and all the

The Tents of the Arabs

voices are one. I often think the city speaks to me then : she says in that voice of hers, " Aoob, Aoob, who one of these days shall die, I am not earthly, I have been always, I shall not die."

BEL-NARB.

I do not think that cities are loveliest at dawn. We can see dawn in the desert any day. I think they are loveliest just when the sun is set and a dusk steals along the narrower streets, a dusk that is not of the night yet not of the day, a kind of mystery in which we can see cloaked figures and yet not quite discern whose figures they be. And just when it would be dark, and out in the desert there would be nothing to see but a black horizon and a black sky on top of it, just then the swinging lanterns are lighted up and lights come out in windows one by one and all the colours of the raiments change. Then a woman perhaps will slip from a little door and go away up the street into the night, and a man perhaps will steal by with a dagger for some old quarrel's sake, and Skarmi will light up his house to sell brandy all night long, and men will sit on benches outside his door playing skabásh by the glare of a small green lantern, while they light great bubbling

The Tents of the Arabs

pipes and smoke nargroob. O, it is all very good to watch. And I like to think as I smoke and see these things that somewhere, far away, the desert has put up a huge red cloud like a wing so that all the Arabs know that next day the Siroc will blow, the accursed breath of Eblis the father of Satan.

AOOB.

Yes, it is pleasant to think of the Siroc when one is safe in a city, but I do not like to think about it now, for before the day is out we will be taking pilgrims to Mecca, and who ever prophesied or knew by wit what the desert had in store? Going into the desert is like throwing bone after bone to a dog, some he will catch and some of them he will drop. He may catch our bones, or we may go by and come to gleaming Mecca. O-ho, I would I were a merchant with a little booth in a frequented street to sit all day and barter.

BEL-NARB.

Aye, it is easier to cheat some lord coming to buy silk and ornaments in a city than to cheat death in the desert. Oh, the desert, the desert, I love the beautiful cities and I hate the desert.

The Tents of the Arabs

AOOB.

[*Pointing off L.*]

Who is that ?

BEL-NARB.

What ? There by the desert's edge where the
camels are ?

AOOB.

Yes, who is it ?

BEL-NARB.

He is staring across the desert the way that the
camels go. They say that the King goes down to
the edge of the desert and often stares across it.
He stands there for a long time of an evening
looking towards Mecca.

AOOB.

Of what use is it to the King to look towards
Mecca ? He cannot go to Mecca. He cannot go
into the desert for one day. Messengers would
run after him and cry his name and bring him
back to the council-hall or to the chamber of
judgments. If they could not find him their
heads would be struck off and put high up upon
some windy roof : the judges would point at them
and say, "They see better there ! "

The Tents of the Arabs

BEL-NARB.

No, the King cannot go away into the desert.
If God were to make *me* King I would go down
to the edge of the desert once, and I would shake
the sand out of my turban and out of my beard
and then I would never look at the desert again.
Greedy and parched old parent of thousands of
devils! He might cover the wells with sand, and
blow with his Siroc, year after year and century
after century, and never earn one of my curses—
if God made *me* King.

AOOB.

They say you are like the King.

BEL-NARB.

Yes, I am like the King. Because his father
disguised himself as a camel-driver and came
through our villages. I often say to myself,
“God is just. And if I could disguise myself as
the King and drive him out to be a camel-driver,
that would please God for He is just.”

AOOB.

If you did this God would say, “Look at Bel-
Narb, whom I made to be a camel-driver and who

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has forgotten this." And then he would forget you, Bel-Narb.

BEL-NARB.

Who knows what God would say ?

AOOB.

Who knows ? His ways are wonderful.

BEL-NARB.

I would not do this thing, Aoob. I would not do it. It is only what I say to myself as I smoke, or at night out in the desert. I say to myself, "Bel-Narb is King in Thalanna." And then I say, "Chamberlain, bring Skarmi here with his brandy and his lanterns and boards to play skabash, and let all the town come and drink before the palace and magnify my name."

PILGRIMS.

[*Calling, off.*]

Bel-Narb ! Bel-Narb ! Child of two dogs.
Come and untether your camels. Come and start
for holy Mecca.

BEL-NARB.

A curse on the desert.

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Aoob.

The camels are rising. The caravan starts for
Mecca. Farewell, beautiful city.

[*Pilgrims' voices off: "Bel-Narb!"*
"Bel-Narb!"]

BEL-NARB.

I come, children of sin.

[*Exeunt Bel-Narb and Aoob.*]

[*The King enters through the great door
crowned. He sits upon the step.*]

KING.

A crown should not be worn upon the head.
A sceptre should not be carried in Kings' hands.
But a crown should be wrought into a golden
chain, and a sceptre driven stake-wise into the
ground so that a King may be chained to it by the
ankle. Then he would *know* that he might not
stray away into the beautiful desert and might
never see the palm trees by the wells. O Thalanna,
Thalanna, how I hate this city with its narrow,
narrow ways, and evening after evening drunken
men playing skabash in the scandalous gambling
house of that old scoundrel Skarmi. O that I
might marry the child of some unkingly house
that generation to generation had never known a

The Tents of the Arabs

city, and that we might ride from here down the long track through the desert, always we two alone till we came to the tents of the Arabs. And the crown—some foolish, greedy man should be given it to his sorrow. And all this may not be, for a King is yet a King.

[Enter Chamberlain through door.]

CHAMBERLAIN.

Your Majesty !

KING.

Well, my lord Chamberlain, have you *more* work for me to do ?

CHAMBERLAIN.

Yes, there is much to do.

KING.

I had hoped for freedom for this evening, for the faces of the camels are towards Mecca, and I would see the caravans move off into the desert where I may not go.

CHAMBERLAIN.

There is very much for your Majesty to do. Ultra has revolted.

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KING.

Where is Iktra ?

CHAMBERLAIN.

It is a little country tributary to your Majesty beyond Zebdarlon, up among the hills.

KING.

Almost, had it not been for this, almost I had asked you to let me go away among the camel-drivers to golden Mecca. I have done the work of a King now for five years and listened to my councillors, and all the while the desert called to me ; he said, "Come to the tents of my children, to the tents of my children !" And all the while I dwelt among these walls.

CHAMBERLAIN.

If your Majesty left the city now —

KING.

I will not, we must raise an army to punish the men of Iktra.

CHAMBERLAIN.

Your Majesty will appoint the commanders by name. A tribe of your Majesty's fighting men must be summoned from Agrarva and another from Coloono, the jungle city, as well as one

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from Mirsk. This must be done by warrants sealed by your hand. Your Majesty's advisers await you in the council-hall.

KING.

The sun is very low. Why have the caravans not started yet?

CHAMBERLAIN.

I do not know. And then your Majesty —

KING.

[*Laying his hand on the Chamberlain's arm.*]

Look, look! It is the shadows of the camels moving towards Mecca. How silently they slip over the ground, beautiful shadows. Soon they are out in the desert flat on the golden sands. And then the sun will set and they will be one with night.

CHAMBERLAIN.

If your Majesty has time for such things there are the camels themselves.

KING.

No, no, I do not wish to watch the camels. They can never take me out to the beautiful desert to be free forever from cities. Here I must

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stay to do the work of a King. Only my dreams can go, and the shadows of the camels carry them, to find peace by the tents of the Arabs.

CHAMBERLAIN.

Will your Majesty now come to the council-hall?

KING.

Yes, yes, I come.

[*Voices off:* "Ho *Yo!* Ho *Yay!* Ho *Yo.* Ho *Yay!*"]

Now the whole caravan has started. Hark to the drivers of the baggage-camels. They will run behind them for the first ten miles, and to-morrow they will mount them. They will be out of sight of Thalanna then, and the desert will lie all round them with sunlight falling on its golden smiles. And a new look will come into their faces. I am sure that the desert whispers to them by night saying, "Be at peace, my children, at peace, my children."

[Meanwhile the Chamberlain has opened the door for the King and is waiting there bowing, with his hand resolutely on the opened door.]

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CHAMBERLAIN.

Your Majesty will come to the council-hall ?

KING.

Yes, I will come. Had it not been for Iktra I might have gone away and lived in the golden desert for a year, and seen holy Mecca.

CHAMBERLAIN.

Perhaps your Majesty might have gone had it not been for Iktra.

KING.

My curse upon Iktra !

[*He goes through the doorway.*]

[*As they stand in doorway enter Zabra R.*]

ZABRA.

Your Majesty.

KING.

O-ho. More work for an unhappy King.

ZABRA.

Iktra is pacified.

KING.

Is pacified ?

ZABRA.

It happened suddenly. The men of Iktra met with a few of your Majesty's fighting men and an

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arrow chanced to kill the leader of the revolt,
and therefore the mob fled away although they
were many, and they have all cried for three
hours, "Great is the King!"

KING.

I will even yet see Mecca and the dreamed-of
tents of the Arabs. I will go down now into the
golden sands, I —

CHAMBERLAIN.

Your Majesty —

KING.

In a few years I will return to you.

CHAMBERLAIN.

Your Majesty, it cannot be. We could not
govern the people for more than a year. They
would say, "The King is dead, the King —"

KING.

Then I will return in a year. In one year only.

CHAMBERLAIN.

It is a long time, your Majesty.

KING.

I will return at noon a year from to-day.

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CHAMBERLAIN.

But, your Majesty, a princess is being sent for from Tharba.

KING.

I thought one was coming from Karshish.

CHAMBERLAIN.

It has been thought more advisable that your Majesty should wed in Tharba. The passes across the mountains belong to the King of Tharba and he has great traffic with Sharan and the Isles.

KING.

Let it be as you will.

CHAMBERLAIN.

But, your Majesty, the ambassadors start this week; the princess will be here in three months' time.

KING.

Let her come in a year and a day.

CHAMBERLAIN.

Your Majesty!

KING.

Farewell, I am in haste. I go to make ready for the desert [*exit through door still speaking*], the olden, golden mother of happy men.

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CHAMBERLAIN.

[*To Zabra.*]

One from whom God had not withheld all wisdom would not have given that message to our crazy young King.

ZABRA.

But it must be known. Many things might happen if it were not known at once.

CHAMBERLAIN.

I knew it this morning. He is off to the desert now.

ZABRA.

That is evil indeed ; but we can lure him back.

CHAMBERLAIN.

Perhaps not for many days.

ZABRA.

The King's favour is like gold.

CHAMBERLAIN.

It is like much gold. Who are the Arabs that the King's favour should be cast among them ? The walls of their houses are canvas. Even the common snail has a finer wall to his house.

The Tents of the Arabs

ZABRA.

O, it is most evil. Alas that I told him this.
We shall be poor men.

CHAMBERLAIN.

No one will give us gold for many days.

ZABRA.

Yet you will govern Thalanna while he is away. You can increase the taxes of the merchants and the tribute of the men that till the fields.

CHAMBERLAIN.

They will only pay taxes and tribute to the King, who gives of his bounty to just and upright men when he is in Thalanna. But while he is away the surfeit of his wealth will go to unjust men and to men whose beards are unclean and who fear not God.

ZABRA.

We shall indeed be poor.

CHAMBERLAIN.

A little gold perhaps from evil-doers for justice.
Or a little money to decide the dispute of some

The Tents of the Arabs

righteous wealthy man ; but no more till the King returns, whom God prosper.

ZABRA.

God increase him. Will you yet try to detain him ?

CHAMBERLAIN.

No. When he comes by with his retinue and escort I will walk beside his horse and tell him that a progress through the desert will well impress the Arabs with his splendour and turn their hearts towards him. And I will speak privily to some captain at the rear of the escort and he shall afterwards speak to the chief commander that he may lose the camel-track in a few days' time and take the King and his followers to wander in the desert and so return by chance to Thalanna again. And it may yet be well with us. We will wait here till they come by.

ZABRA.

Will the chief commander do this thing certainly ?

CHAMBERLAIN.

Yes, he will be one Thakbar, a poor man and a righteous.

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ZABRA.

But if he be not Thakbar but some greedy man
who demands more gold that we would give
to Thakbar ?

CHAMBERLAIN.

Why, then we must give him even what he de-
mands, and God will punish his greed.

ZABRA.

He must come past us here.

CHAMBERLAIN.

Yes, he must come this way. He will summon
the cavalry from the Saloia Samáng.

ZABRA.

It will be nearly dark before they can come.

CHAMBERLAIN.

No, he is in great haste. He will pass before
sunset. He will make them mount at once.

ZABRA.

[*Looking off R.*]

I do not see any stir at the Saloia.

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CHAMBERLAIN.

[*Looking too.*]

No—No. I do not see. He will *make* a stir.

[*As they look a man comes through the doorway wearing a coarse brown cloak which falls over his forehead. He exits furtively L.*]

What man is that? He has gone down to the camels.

ZABRA.

He has given a piece of money to one of the camel-drivers.

CHAMBERLAIN.

See, he has mounted.

ZABRA.

Can it have been the King!

[*Voice off L. "Ho-Yo! Ho-Yay!"*]

CHAMBERLAIN.

It is only some camel-driver going into the desert. How glad his voice sounds.

ZABRA.

The Siroc will swallow him.

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CHAMBERLAIN.

What—if it were the King!

ZABRA.

Why, if it were the King we should starve for
a year.

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

The same scene.

One year has elapsed.

[*The King, wrapped in a camel-driver's cloak, sits by Eznarza, a gypsy of the desert.*]

KING.

Now I have known the desert and dwelt in the tents of the Arabs.

EZNARZA.

There is no land like the desert and like the Arabs no people.

KING.

It is all over and done ; I return to the walls of my fathers.

EZNARZA.

Time cannot put it away ; I go back to the desert that nursed me.

KING.

Did you think in those days on the sands, or among the tents in the mornings, that my year

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would ever end, and I be brought away by strength of my word to the prisoning of a palace?

EZNARZA.

I knew that Time would do it, for my people have learned the way of him.

KING.

Is it then Time that has mocked our futile prayers? Is he greater than God that he has laughed at our praying?

EZNARZA.

We may not say that he is greater than God. Yet we prayed that our own year might not pass away. God could not save it.

KING.

Yes, yes. We prayed that prayer. All men would laugh at it.

EZNARZA.

The prayer was not laughable. Only he that is lord of the years is obdurate. If a man prayed for life to a furious, merciless Sultan well might the Sultan's slaves laugh. Yet it is not laughable to pray for life.

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KING.

Yes, we are slaves of Time. To-morrow brings
the princess who comes from Tharba. We must
bow our heads.

EZNARZA.

My people say that Time lives in the desert.
He lies there in the sun.

KING.

No, no, not in the desert. Nothing alters there.

EZNARZA.

My people say that the desert is his country.
He smites not his own country, my people say.
But he overwhelms all other lands of the world.

KING.

Yes, the desert is always the same, ev'n the
littlest rocks of it.

EZNARZA.

They say that he loves the Sphinx and does not
harm her. They say that he does not dare to
harm the Sphinx. She has borne him many gods
whom the infidels worship.

KING.

Their father is more terrible than all the false
gods.

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EZNARZA.

O, that he had but spared our little year.

KING.

He destroys all things utterly.

EZNARZA.

There is a little child of man that is mightier
than he, and who saves the world from Time.

KING.

Who is this little child that is mightier than
Time ? Is it Love that is mightier ?

EZNARZA.

No, not Love.

KING.

If he conquer even Love then none are mightier.

EZNARZA.

He scares Love away with weak white hairs
and with wrinkles. Poor little love, poor Love,
Time scares him away.

KING.

What is this child of man that can conquer
Time and that is braver than Love ?

EZNARZA.

Even Memory.

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KING.

Yes. I will call to him when the wind is from the desert and the locusts are beaten against my obdurate walls. I will call to him more when I cannot see the desert and cannot hear the wind of it.

EZNARZA.

He shall bring back our year to us that Time cannot destroy. Time cannot slaughter it if Memory says no. It is reprieved, though banished. We shall often see it though a little far off and all its hours and days shall dance to us and go by one by one and come back and dance again.

KING.

Why, that is true. They shall come back to us. I had thought that they that work miracles whether in Heaven or Earth were unable to do one thing. I thought that they could not bring back days again when once they had fallen into the hands of Time.

EZNARZA.

It is a trick that Memory can do. He comes up softly in the town or the desert, wherever a

The Tents of the Arabs

few men are, like the strange dark conjurors who sing to snakes, and he does his trick before them, and does it again and again.

KING.

We will often make him bring the old days back when you are gone to your people and I am miserably wedded to the princess coming from Tharba.

EZNARZA.

They will come with sand on their feet from the golden, beautiful desert, they will come with a long-gone sunset each one over his head. Their lips will laugh with the olden evening voices.

KING.

It is nearly noon. It is nearly noon. It is nearly noon.

EZNARZA.

Why, we part then.

KING.

O, come into the city and be Queen there. I will send its princess back again to Tharba. You shall be Queen in Thalanna.

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EZNARZA.

I go now back to my people. You will wed
the princess from Tharba on the morrow. You
have said it. I have said it.

KING.

O, that I had not given my word to return.

EZNARZA.

A King's word is like a King's crown and a
King's sceptre and a King's throne. It is in fact
a foolish thing, like a city.

KING.

I cannot break my word. But you can be queen
in Thalanna.

EZNARZA.

Thalanna will not have a gypsy for a queen.

KING.

I will *make* Thalanna have her for a queen.

EZNARZA.

You cannot make a gypsy live for a year in a
city.

KING.

I knew of a gypsy that lived once in a city.

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EZNARZA.

Not such a gypsy as I . . . come back to
the tents of the Arabs.

KING.

I cannot. I gave my word.

EZNARZA.

Kings have broken their words.

KING.

Not such a King as I.

EZNARZA.

We have only that little child of man whose
name is Memory.

KING.

Come. He shall bring back to us, before we
part, one of those days that were banished.

EZNARZA.

Let it be the first day. The day we met by the
well when the camels came to El-Lolith.

KING.

Our year lacked some few days. For my year
began here. The camels were some days out.

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EZNARZA.

You were riding a little wide of the caravan,
upon the side of the sunset. Your camel was
swinging on with easy strides. But you were
tired.

KING.

You had come to the well for water. At first
I could see your eyes, then the stars came out,
and it grew dark and I only saw your shape, and
there was a little light about your hair: I do not
know if it was the light of the stars, I only knew
that it shone.

EZNARZA.

And then you spoke to me about the camels.

KING.

Then I heard your voice. You did not say the
things you would say now.

EZNARZA.

Of course I did not.

KING.

You did not say things in the same way even.

EZNARZA.

How the hours come dancing back.

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KING.

No, no. Only their shadows. We went together then to Holy Mecca. We dwelt alone in tents in the golden desert. We heard the wild free day sing songs in his freedom, we heard the beautiful night-wind. Nothing remains of our year but desolate shadows. Memory whips them and they will not dance.

[*Eznaiza does not answer.*]

We made our farewells where the desert was.
The city shall not hear them.

[*Eznaiza covers her face. The King rises softly and walks up the steps. Enter L. the Chamberlain and Zabra, only noticing each other.*]

CHAMBERLAIN.

He will come. He will come.

ZABRA.

But it is noon now. Our fatness has left us.
Our enemies mock at us. If he do not come God
has forgotten us and our friends will pity us!

CHAMBERLAIN.

If he is alive he will come.

[Enter Bel-Narb and Aoob.]

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ZABRA.

I fear that it is past noon.

CHAMBERLAIN.

Then he is dead or robbers have waylaid him.

[*Chamberlain and Zabra put dust on their heads.*]

BEL-NARB.

[*To Aoob.*]

God is just !

[*To Chamberlain and Zabra.*]

I am the King !

[*The King's hand is on the door. When Bel-Narb says this he goes down the steps again and sits beside the gypsy. She raises her head from her hands and looks at him fixedly. He partially covers his face Arab fashion and watches Bel-Narb and the Chamberlain and Zabra.*]

CHAMBERLAIN.

Are you indeed the King ?

BEL-NARB.

I am the King.

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CHAMBERLAIN.

Your Majesty has altered much since a year ago.

BEL-NARB.

Men alter in the desert. And alter much.

AOOE.

Indeed, your Excellency, he is the King. When the King went into the desert disguised I fed his camel. Indeed he is the King.

ZABRA.

He is the King. I know the King when I see him.

CHAMBERLAIN.

You have seen the King seldom.

ZABRA.

I have often seen the King.

BEL-NARB.

Yes, we have often met, often and often.

CHAMBERLAIN.

If some one could recognize your Majesty, some one besides this man who came with you, then we should all be certain.

The Tents of the Arabs

BEL-NARB.

There is no need of it. I am the King.

[*The King rises and stretches out his hand palm downwards.*]

KING.

In holy Mecca, in green-roofed Mecca of the many gates, we knew him for the King.

BEL-NARB.

Yes, that is true. I saw this man in Mecca.

CHAMBERLAIN.

[*Bowing low.*]

Pardon, your Majesty. The desert had altered you.

ZABRA.

I knew your Majesty.

AOOB.

As well as I do.

BEL-NARB.

[*Pointing to the King.*]

Let this man be rewarded suitably. Give him some post in the palace.

CHAMBERLAIN.

Yes, your Majesty.

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KING.

I am a camel-driver and we go back to our camels.

CHAMBERLAIN.

As you wish.

[*Exeunt Bel-Narb, Aosb, Chamberlain and Zabra through door.*]

EZNARZA.

You have done wisely, wisely, and the reward of wisdom is happiness.

KING.

They have their king now. But we will turn again to the tents of the Arabs.

EZNARZA.

They are foolish people.

KING.

They have found a foolish king.

EZNARZA.

It is a foolish man that would choose to dwell among walls.

KING.

Some are born kings, but this man has chosen to be one.

The Tents of the Arabs

EZNARZA.

Come, let us leave them.

KING.

We will go back again.

EZNARZA.

Come back to the tents of my people.

KING.

We will dwell a little apart in a dear brown
tent of our own.

EZNARZA.

We shall hear the sand again, whispering low
to the dawn-wind.

KING.

We shall hear the nomads stirring in their
camps far off because it is dawn.

EZNARZA.

The jackals will patter past us slipping back to
the hills.

KING.

When at evening the sun is set we shall weep
for no day that is gone.

The Tents of the Arabs

EZNARZA.

I will raise up my head of a night-time against
the sky, and the old, old unbought stars shall
twinkle through my hair, and we shall not envy
any of the diademmed queens of the world.

CURTAIN



Photo by White Studio. Courtesy of Portmanteau Theater

THE LAUGHTER OF THE GODS

First produced on January 15th, 1919,
at the Punch and Judy Theatre in New
York. Directed by Stuart Walker. First
published in Dunsany's *Five Plays*,
1911.

The Laughter of the Gods
A Tragedy in Three Acts

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

KING KARNOS.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS, *a prophet.*

ICHTHARION.

LUDIBRAS.

HARPAGAS.

FIRST SENTRY.

SECOND SENTRY.

ONE OF THE CAMEL GUARD.

AN EXECUTIONER.

THE QUEEN.

THARMIA, *wife of Ichiharion.*

AROLIND, *wife of Ludibras.*

CAROLYX, *wife of Harpagas.*

ATTENDANTS.

SCENE:—*The jungle city of Thek in
the reign of King Karnos.*

TIME:—*About the time of the de-
cadence in Babylon.*

The Laughter of the Gods

ACT I.

The jungle city of Thek in the reign of King Karnos.

THARMIA.

You know that my lineage is almost divine.

AROLIND.

My father's sword was so terrible that he had to hide it with a cloak.

THARMIA.

He probably did that because there were no jewels in the scabbard.

AROLIND.

There were emeralds in it that outstared the sea.

* * *

THARMIA.

Now I must leave you here and go down among the shops for I have not changed my hair since we came to Thek.

The Laughter of the Gods

ICHTHARION.

Have you not brought that from Barbul-el-Sharnak?

THARMIA.

It was not necessary. The King would not take his court where they could not obtain necessities.

AROLIND.

May I go with your Sincerity?

THARMIA.

Indeed, Princely Lady, I shall be glad of your company.

AROLIND.

[*To Ludibras.*]

I wish to see the other palaces in Thek, [*to Tharmia*] then we can go beyond the walls to see what princes live in the neighbourhood.

THARMIA.

It will be delightful.

[*Exeunt Tharmia and Arolind.*]

ICHTHARION.

Well, we are here in Thek.

The Laughter of the Gods

LUDIBRAS.

How lucky we are that the King has come to
Thek. I feared he would never come.

ICHTHARION.

It is a most fair city.

LUDIBRAS.

When he still tarried year after year in mon-
strous Barbul-el-Sharnak, I feared that I would
see the sun rise never more in the windy glorious
country. I feared we should live always in
Barbul-el-Sharnak and be buried among houses.

ICHTHARION.

It is mountainous with houses: there are no
flowers there. I wonder how the winds come
into it.

LUDIBRAS.

Ah. Do you know that it is I that brought
him here at last? I gave him orchids day by
day that came from a far country. At last he
noticed them. "These are good flowers," said
he. "They come from Thek," I said. "Thek is
purple with them. It seems purple far out on the
sand to the camel men." Then . . .

The Laughter of the Gods

ICHTHARION.

No, it was not you that brought him. He saw a butterfly once in Barbul-el-Sharnak. There had not been one there for seven years. It was lucky for us that it lived: I used to send for hundreds, but they all died but that one when they came to Barbul-el-Sharnak. The King saw it.

LUDIBRAS.

It was since then that he noticed my purple orchids.

ICHTHARION.

Something changed in his mind when he saw the butterfly. He became quite different. He would not have noticed a flower but for that.

LUDIBRAS.

He came to Thek in order to see the orchids.

ICHTHARION.

Come, come. We are here. Nothing else matters.

LUDIBRAS.

Yes, we are here. How beautiful are the orchids.

ICHTHARION.

What a beautiful thing the air is in the morning. I stand up very early and breathe it from

The Laughter of the Gods

my casement: not in order to nourish my body,
you understand, but because it is the wild, sweet
air of Thek.

LUDIBRAS.

Yes, it is wonderful rising up in the morning.
It seems all fresh from the fields.

ICHTHARION.

It took us three days to ride out of Barbul-el-Sharnak. Do you remember how men stared at our camels? No one had gone away from the city for years.

LUDIBRAS.

I think it is not easy to leave so great a city.
It seems to grow thicker around you, and you
forget the fields.

ICHTHARION.

[*Looking off.*]

The jungle is like a sea lying there below us.
The orchids that blaze on it are like Tyrian ships,
all rich with purple of that wonderful fish ; they
have even dyed their sails with it.

LUDIBRAS.

They are not like ships because they do not
move. They are like . . . They are like no

The Laughter of the Gods

tangible thing in all the world. They are like faint, beautiful songs of an unseen singer ; they are like temptation to some unknown sin. They make me think of the tigers that slip through the gloom below them.

[Enter Harpagas and attendants with
spears and leather belts.]

ICHTHARION.

Why, where are you going ?

HARPAGAS.

We are going hunting.

ICHTHARION.

Hunting ! How beautiful !

HARPAGAS.

A little street goes down from the palace door ;
the other end of it touches the very jungle.

LUDIBRAS.

O, heavenly city of Thek.

ICHTHARION.

Have you ever before gone hunting ?

HARPAGAS.

No: I have dreamed of it. In Barbul-el-Sharnak I nearly forgot my dream.

The Laughter of the Gods

ICHTHARION.

Man was not made for cities. I did not know
this once.

LUDIBRAS.

I will come with you.

ICHTHARION.

I will come with you, too. We will go down
by the little street, and there will be the jungle.
I will fetch a spear as we go.

LUDIBRAS.

What shall we hunt in the jungle?

HARPAGAS.

They say there are kroot and abbax; and tigers,
some say, have been heard of. We must never
go back to Barbul-el-Sharnak again.

ICHTHARION.

You may rely on us.

LUDIBRAS.

We shall keep the King in Thek.

[*Exeunt, leaving two sentries standing be-
side the throne.*]

1ST SENTRY.

They are all very glad to be in Thek. I, too,
am glad.

The Laughter of the Gods

2ND SENTRY.

It is a very little city. Two hundred of these cities would not build Barbul-el-Sharnak.

1ST SENTRY.

No. But it is a finer palace, and Barbul-el-Sharnak is the centre of the world: men have drawn together there.

2ND SENTRY.

I did not know there was a palace like this outside Barbul-el-Sharnak.

1ST SENTRY.

It was built in the days of the Forefather. They built palaces in those days.

2ND SENTRY.

They must be in the jungle by now. It is quite close. How glad they were to go.

1ST SENTRY.

Yes, they were glad. Men do not hunt for tigers in Barbul-el-Sharnak.

[Enter Tharmia and Arolind weeping.]

THARMIA.

O it is terrible.

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AROLIND.

O! O! O!

1ST SENTRY.

[To 2nd Sentry.]

Something has happened.

[Enter Carolyx.]

CAROLYX.

What is it, princely ladies ?

[To Sentries.]

Go. Go away.

[Exeunt Sentries.]

What has happened ?

THARMIA.

O. We went down a little street.

CAROLYX.

Yes. Yes.

AROLIND.

The main street of the city.

[Both weep quietly.]

CAROLYX.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

THARMIA.

It ends in the jungle.

The Laughter of the Gods

CAROLYX.

You went into the jungle! There must be tigers there.

THARMIA.

No.

AROLIND.

No.

CAROLYX.

What did you do?

THARMIA.

We came back.

CAROLYX.

[*In a voice of anguish.*]

What did you see in the street?

THARMIA.

Nothing.

AROLIND.

Nothing.

CAROLYX.

Nothing?

THARMIA.

There are no shops.

AROLIND.

We cannot buy new hair.

The Laughter of the Gods

THARMIA.

We cannot buy [*sobs*] gold-dust to put upon our hair.

AROLIND.

There are no [*sobs*] neighbouring princes.

CAROLYX.

[*Bursts bitterly into tears and continues to weep.*]

THARMIA.

Barbul-el-Sharnak, Barbul-el-Sharnak. O why did the King leave Barbul-el-Sharnak ?

AROLIND.

Barbul-el-Sharnak. Its streets were all of agate.

THARMIA.

And there were shops where one bought beautiful hair.

CAROLYX.

The King must go at once.

THARMIA.

[*Calmer now.*]

He shall go to-morrow. My husband shall speak to him.

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AEOLIND.

Perhaps my husband might have more influence.

THARMIA AND AROLIND.

My husband brought him here.

THARMIA.

What!

AROLIND.

Nothing. What did you say?

THARMIA.

I said nothing. I thought you spoke.

CAROLYX.

It may be better for my husband to persuade the King, for he was ever opposed to his coming to Thek.

THARMIA.

[*To Arolind.*]

He could have but little influence with His Majesty since the King *has* come to Thek.

AROLIND.

No. It will be better for our husbands to arrange it.

CAROLYX.

I have myself some influence with the Queen.

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THARMIA.

It is of no use. Her nerves are all a-quiver.
She weeps if you speak with her. If you argue a
matter with her she cries aloud and maidens must
come and fan her and put scent on her hands.

AROLIND.

She never leaves her chamber and the King
would not listen to her.

THARMIA.

Hark, they are coming back. They are sing-
ing a hunting song. . . . Why, they have
killed a beast. All four of the men are bringing
it on two branches.

AROLIND.

[*Bored.*]

What kind of a beast is it?

THARMIA.

I do not know. It seems to have barbed horns.

CAROLYX.

We must go and meet them.

[*The song is loud and joyous. Exeunt by
the way that the Sentries went.*]

[*Enter Sentries.*]

The Laughter of the Gods

1ST SENTRY.

Whatever it is it has passed away again for
they were smiling.

2ND SENTRY.

They feared that their husbands were lost and
now they return in safety.

1ST SENTRY.

You do not know, for you do not understand
women.

2ND SENTRY.

I understand them quite as well as *you*.

1ST SENTRY.

That is what I say. You do not understand
women. I do not understand them.

2ND SENTRY.

. . . . Oh.

[*A pause*]

1ST SENTRY.

We shall never leave Thek now.

2ND SENTRY.

Why shall we never leave it ?

1ST SENTRY.

Did you not hear how glad they were when
they sang the hunting song ? They say a wild

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dog does not turn from the trail, they will go on hunting now.

2ND SENTRY.

But will the King stay here?

1ST SENTRY.

He only does what Ichtharion and Ludibras persuade him. He does not listen to the Queen.

2ND SENTRY.

The Queen is mad.

1ST SENTRY.

She is not mad but she has a curious sickness, she is always frightened though there is nothing to fear.

2ND SENTRY.

That would be a dreadful sickness; one would fear that the roof might fall on one from above or the earth break in pieces beneath. I would rather be mad than to fear things like that.

1ST SENTRY.

[*Looking straight before him.*]

Hush.

[*Enter King and retinue. He sits on the throne.*]

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[Enter from other side Ichharion, Ludibras and Harpagas, each with his wife beside him, hand in hand. Each couple bows before the King, still hand in hand; then they seat themselves. The King nods once to each couple.]

KING.

[To Tharmia.]

Well, your Sincerity, I trust that you are glad to have come to Thek.

THARMIA.

Very glad, your Majesty.

KING.

[To Arolind.]

This is pleasanter, is it not, than Barbul el-Sharnak?

AROLIND.

Far pleasanter, your Majesty.

KING.

And you, princely lady Carolyx, find all that you need in Thek?

CAROLYX.

More than all, your Majesty.

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KING.

[*To Harpagas.*]

Then we can stay here long, can we not?

HARPAGAS.

There are reasons of State why that were dangerous.

KING.

Reasons of State? Why should we not stay here?

HARPAGAS.

Your Majesty, there is a legend in the World, that he who is greatest in the city of Barbul-el-Sharnak is the greatest in the world.

KING.

I had not heard that legend.

HARPAGAS.

Your Majesty, little legends do not hive in the sacred ears of kings; nevertheless they hum among lesser men from generation unto generation.

KING.

I will not go for a legend to Barbul-el-Sharnak.

HARPAGAS.

Your Majesty, it is very dangerous. . . .

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KING.

[*To Ladies.*]

We discuss things of State which little interest
your Sincerities.

THARMIA.

[*Rising.*]

Your Majesty, we are ignorant of these things.

[*Exeunt.*]

KING.

[*To Ichtharion and Ludibras.*]

We will rest from things of State for awhile,
shall we not? We will be happy, shall we not, in
this ancient beautiful palace?

LUDIBRAS.

If your Majesty commands, we must obey.

KING.

But is not Thek most beautiful? Are not the
jungle orchids a wonder and a glory?

LUDIBRAS.

They have been thought so, your Majesty; they
were pretty in Barbul-el-Sharnak where they were
rare.

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KING.

But when the sun comes over them in the morning, when the dew is on them still : are they not glorious then ? Indeed, they are very glorious.

LUDIBRAS.

I think they would be glorious if they were blue, and if there were fewer of them.

KING.

I do not think so. But you, Ichtharion, you think the city beautiful ?

ICHTHARION.

Yes, your Majesty.

KING.

Ah. I am glad you love it. It is to me adorable.

ICHTHARION.

I do not love it, your Majesty. I hate it very much. I know it is beautiful because your Majesty has said so.

LUDIBRAS.

This city is dangerously unhealthy, your Majesty.

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HARPAGAS.

It is dangerous to be absent from Barbul-el-Sharnak.

ICHTHARION.

We implore your Majesty to return to the centre of the World.

KING.

I will not go again to Barbul-el-Sharnak.

[*Exeunt King with attendants. Ichtharion, Ludibras and Harpagas remain.*]

[*Enter Arolind and Carolyx; each goes up to her husband very affectionate.*]

AROLIND.

And you talked to the King?

LUDIBRAS.

Yes.

AROLIND.

You told him he must go back to Barbul-el-Sharnak at once?

LUDIBRAS.

Well, I . . .

AROLIND.

When does he start?

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LUDIBRAS.

He did not say he will start.

AROLIND.

What!

CAROLYX.

We are not going?

[*Arolind and Carolyx weep and step away from their husbands.*]

LUDIBRAS.

But we spoke to the King.

AROLIND.

O, we must stay and die here.

LUDIBRAS,

But we did what we could.

AROLIND.

O, I shall be buried in Thek.

LUDIBRAS.

I can do no more.

AROLIND.

My clothes are torn, my hair is old. I am in rags.

LUDIBRAS.

I am sure you are beautifully dressed.

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AROLIND.

[*Full height.*]

Beautifully dressed ! Of course I am beautifully dressed ! But who is there to see me ? I am alone in the jungle, and here I shall be buried.

LUDIBRAS.

But . . .

AROLIND.

Oh, will you not leave me alone ? Is nothing sacred to you ? Not even my grief ?

[*Exeunt Arolind and Carolyx.*]

HARPAGAS.

[*To Ludibras.*]

What are we to do ?

LUDIBRAS.

All women are alike.

ICHTHARION.

I do not allow my wife to speak to me like that.

[*Exeunt Harpagas and Ludibras.*]

I hope Tharmia will not also weep ; it is very distressing to see a woman in tears.

[*Enter Tharmia.*]

Do not be unhappy, do not be at all unhappy. But I have been unable to persuade the King to

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return to Barbul-el-Sharnak. You will be happy here after a little while.

THARMIA.

[*Breaks into loud laughter.*]

You are the King's adviser. Ha—ha—ha !
You are the Grand High Vizier of the Court.
Ha—ha—ha. *You* are the warder of the golden wand. Ha—ha—ha ! O, go and throw biscuits to the King's dog.

ICHTHARION.

What !

THARMIA.

Throw little ginger biscuits to the King's dog. Perhaps he will obey you. Perhaps you will have some influence with the King's dog if you feed him with little biscuits. You —

[*Laughs and exits.*]

ICHTHARION.

[*Sits with his miserable head in his hands.*]

[*Reënter Ludibras and Harpagas.*]

LUDIBRAS.

Has her Sincerity, the princely Lady Tharmia, been speaking with you ?

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ICHTHARION.

She spoke a few words.

[*Ludibras and Harpagas sigh.*]

We must leave Thek. We must depart from
Thek.

LUDIBRAS.

What, without the King ?

HARPAGAS.

No.

ICHTHARION.

No. They would say in Barbul-el-Sharnak
“these were once at the Court,” and men that
we have flogged would spit in our faces.

LUDIBRAS.

Who can command a King ?

HARPAGAS.

Only the gods.

LUDIBRAS.

The gods ? There are no gods now. We have
been civilised over three thousand years. The
gods that nursed our infancy are dead, or gone to
nurse younger nations.

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ICHTHARION.

I refuse to listen to — O, the sentries are gone. No, the gods are no use to us; they were driven away by the decadence.

HARPAGAS.

We are not in the decadence here. Barbul-el-Sharnak is in a different age. The city of Thek is scarcely civilised.

ICHTHARION.

But everybody lives in Barbul-el-Sharnak.

HARPAGAS.

The gods . . .

LUDIBRAS.

The old prophet is coming.

HARPAGAS.

He believes as much in the gods as you or I do.

LUDIBRAS.

Yes, but we must not speak as though we knew that.

[*Voice-of-the-Gods (a prophet) walks across the stage.*]

ICHTHARION, LUDIBRAS AND HARPAGAS.

[*Rising.*]

The gods are good.

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VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

They are benignant.

[*Exit.*]

ICHTHARION.

Listen ! Let him prophesy to the King. Let him bid the King go hence lest they smite the city.

LUDIBRAS.

Can we make him do it ?

ICHTHARION.

I think we can make him do it.

HARPAGAS.

The King is more highly civilised even than we are. He will not care for the gods.

ICHTHARION.

He cannot ignore them ; the gods crowned his forefather and if there are no gods who made him King ?

LUDIBRAS.

Why, that is true. He must obey a prophecy.

ICHTHARION.

If the King disobeys the gods the people will tear him asunder, whether the gods created the people or the people created the gods.

[*Harpag as slips out after the Prophet.*]

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LUDIBRAS.

If the King discovers this we shall be painfully tortured.

ICHTHARION.

How can the King discover it ?

LUDIBRAS.

He knows that there are no gods.

ICHTHARION.

No man knows that of a certainty.

LUDIBRAS.

But if there are . . . !

[Enter Prophet with Harpagas. Ichtharion quickly sends Ludibras and Harpagas away.]

ICHTHARION.

There is a delicate matter concerning the King.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

Then I can help you little for I only serve the gods.

ICHTHARION.

It also concerns the gods.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

Ah. Then I hearken.

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ICHTHARION.

This city is for the King, whose body is fragile, a very unhealthy city. Moreover, there is no work here that a King can profitably do. Also it is dangerous for Barbul-el-Sharnak to be long without a King, lest . . .

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

Does this concern the gods?

ICHTHARION.

In this respect it does concern the gods—that if the gods knew this they would warn the King by inspiring you to make a prophecy. As they do not know this . . .

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

The gods know all things.

ICHTHARION.

The gods do not know things that are not true. This is not strictly true . . .

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

It is written and hath been said that the gods cannot lie.

ICHTHARION.

The gods of course cannot lie, but a prophet may sometimes utter a prophecy that is a good

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prophecy and helpful to men, thereby pleasing the gods, although the prophecy is not a true one.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

The gods speak through my mouth ; my breath is my own breath, I am human and mortal, but my voice is from the gods and the gods cannot lie.

ICHTHARION.

Is it wise in an age when the gods have lost their power to anger powerful men for the sake of the gods ?

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

It is wise.

ICHTHARION.

We are three men and you are alone with us. Will the gods save you if we want to put you to death and slip away with your body into the jungle ?

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

If you should do this thing the gods have willed it. If they have not willed it you cannot.

ICHTHARION.

We do not wish to do it. Nevertheless you will make this prophecy—you will go before the

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King and you will say that the gods have spoken and that within three days' time, for the sake of vengeance upon some unknown man who is in this city, they will overthrow all Thek unless every man is departed.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

I will not do it, for the gods cannot lie.

ICHTHARION.

Has it not been the custom since unremembered time for a prophet to have two wives ?

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

Most certainly. It is indeed the law.

[*Ichtharion holds up three fingers.*]

What !

ICHTHARION.

Three.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

Do not betray me. It was long ago.

ICHTHARION.

You will be allowed to serve the gods no more if men know this. The gods will not protect you in this matter for you have offended also against the gods.

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VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

It is worse that the gods should lie. Do not betray me.

ICHTHARION.

I go to tell the others what I know.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

I will make the false prophecy.

ICHTHARION.

Ah. You have chosen wisely.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

When the gods punish me who make them lie, they will know what punishment to give to you.

ICHTHARION.

The gods will not punish us. It is long ago that the gods used to punish men.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

The gods will punish us.

CURTAIN

ACT II.

Same scene. Same day.

KING KARNOS.

[*Pointing off L.*]

Look at them now, are they not beautiful ?
They catch the last rays of the lingering sun.
Can you say that the orchids are not beautiful
now ?

ICHTHARION.

Your Majesty, we were wrong, they are most
beautiful. They tower up from the jungle to
take the sun. They are like the diadem of some
jubilant king.

KING KARNOS.

Ah. Now you have come to love the beauty
of Thek.

ICHTHARION.

Yes, yes, your Majesty, I see it now. I would
live in this city always.

KING KARNOS.

Yes, we will live here always. There is no city
lovelier than Thek. Am I not right ?

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LUDIBRAS.

Your Majesty is right, no city is like it.

KING KARNOS.

Ah. I am always right.

THARMIA.

How beautiful is Thek.

AROLIND.

Yes, it is like a god.

[*Three notes are stricken on a sonorous gong.*]

WHISPERS.

[*On.*]

There has been a prophecy. There has been a prophecy.

KING KARNOS.

Ah! there has been a prophecy. Bring in the prophet.

[*Exit Attendant.*]

[*Enter mournfully with dejected head and walking very slowly Voice-of-the-Gods.*]

You have made a prophecy.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

I have made a prophecy.

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KING KARNOS.

I would hear that prophecy.

[*A pause.*]

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

Your Majesty, the gods in three days' time . . .

KING KARNOS.

Stop! Is it not usual to begin with certain words?

[*A pause.*]

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

It is written and hath been said . . . It is written and hath been said . . . that the gods cannot lie.

KING KARNOS.

That is right.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

That the gods cannot lie.

KING KARNOS.

Yes. Yes.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

In three days' time the gods will destroy this city for vengeance upon some man, unless all men desert it.

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KING KARNOS.

The gods will destroy Thek !

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

Yes.

KING KARNOS.

When will this happen ?

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

It must be in three days' time.

KING KARNOS.

How will it happen ?

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

Why. It will happen.

KING KARNOS.

How ?

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

Why . . . there will be a sound . . .
as the riving of wood . . . a sound as of
thunder coming up from the ground. A cleft
will run like a mouse across the floor. There
will be a red light, and then no light at all, and
in the darkness Thek shall tumble in.

[*The King sits in deep thought.*]

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[Exit Prophet slowly; he begins to weep, then casts his cloak over his face. He stretches out his arms to grope his way and is led away by the hand. The King sits thinking.]

THARMIA.

Save us, your Majesty.

AROLIND.

Save us.

ICHTHARION.

We must fly, your Majesty.

LUDIBRAS.

We must escape swiftly.

[The King sits still in silence. He lifts a stick on his right to beat a little silver bell; but puts it down again. At last he lifts it up and strikes the bell.]

[An Attendant enters.]

KING KARNOS.

Bring back that prophet.

[Attendant bows and exits.]

[The King looks thoughtful. The rest have a frightened look. Re-enter Prophet.]

When the gods prophesy rain in the season of

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rain, or the death of an old man, we believe them. But when the gods prophesy something incredible and ridiculous, such as happens not nowadays, and hath not been heard of since the fall of Bleth, then our credulity is overtaxed. It is possible that a man should lie; it is not possible that the gods should destroy a city nowadays.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

O King, have mercy.

KING KARNOS.

What, would you be sent safe away while your King is destroyed by the gods?

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

No, no, your Majesty. I would stay in the city, your Majesty. But if the gods do not destroy the city, if the gods have misled me?

KING KARNOS.

If the gods have misled you they have chosen your doom. Why ask for mercy from me?

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

If the gods have misled me, and punish me no further, I ask mercy from you, O King.

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KING KARNOS.

If the gods have misled you, let the gods protect you from my executioner.

1ST SENTRY.

[*Laughs—aside to 2nd Sentry.*]

Very witty.

2ND SENTRY.

Yes, yes.

[*Laughs too.*]

KING KARNOS.

If the doom fall not at sunset why then the executioner . . .

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

Your Majesty !

KING KARNOS.

No more ! No doubt the gods will destroy the city at sunset.

[*The Sentries titter. The Prophet is led away.*]

ICHTHARION.

Your Majesty ! Is it safe to kill a prophet, even for any guilt ? Will not the people . . .

KING KARNOS.

Not while he is a prophet ; but if he has prophesied falsely his death is due to the gods. The

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people once even burned a prophet themselves
because he had taken three wives.

ICHTHARION.

[*Aside to Ludibras.*]

It is most unfortunate, but what can we do ?

LUDIBRAS.

[*Aside to Ichtharion.*]

He will not be killed if he betray us instead.

ICHTHARION.

[*Aside.*]

Why . . . that is true.

[*All are whispering.*]

KING KARNOS.

What do you whisper ?

THARMIA.

Your Majesty, we fear that the gods will des-
troy us all and . . .

KING KARNOS.

You do not fear it.

[*Dead silence.*]

[*A plaintive lament off. Enter the Queen.*

Her face is pale as paper.]

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QUEEN.

[*Log.*]

O your Majesty. Your Majesty. I have heard
the lutanist, I have heard the lutanist.

KING KARNOS.

She means the lute that is heard by those about
to die.

QUEEN.

I have heard Gog-Owza, the lutanist, playing
his lute. And I shall die, O I shall die.

KING KARNOS.

No. No. No. You have not heard Gog-Owza.
Send for her maidens, send for the Queen's maid-
ens.

QUEEN.

I have heard Gog-Owza playing, and I shall die.

KING KARNOS.

Hark. Why, I hear it too. That is not Gog-
Owza, it is only a man with a lute; I hear it too.

QUEEN.

O the King hears it too. The King will die.
The great King will die. My child will be deso-
late for the King will die. Mourn, people of the

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jungle. Mourn, citizens of Thek. And thou, O Barbul-el-Sharnak, O metropolitan city, mourn thou in the midst of the nations, for the great King will die.

KING KARNOS.

No. No. No. [To oldest present.] Listen you. Do you not hear it?

Yes, your Majesty.

KING KARNOS.

You see it is a real lute. That is no spirit playing.

QUEEN.

O but he is old ; in a few days he will die ; it is Gog-Owza, and the King will die.

KING KARNOS.

No, no, it is only a man. Look out of the window there.

[To any Young Man.]

It is dark, your Majesty, and I cannot see.

QUEEN.

It is the spirit Gog-Owza.

I can hear the music clearly.

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KING KARNOS

He is young.

QUEEN.

The young are always in danger; they go about among swords. He will die too and the great King and I. In a few days we will be buried.

KING KARNOS.

Let us all listen; we cannot all die in a few days' time.

THARMIA.

I hear it clearly.

QUEEN.

Women are blossoms in the hand of Death. They are often close to Death. She will die too.

ALL.

I hear it. I hear it. And I. And I. And I. It is only a man with a lute.

QUEEN.

[*Pacified.*]

I should like to see him, then I should know for certain. [*She looks out of the casement.*] No, it is too dark.

KING KARNOS.

We will call the man if you wish it.

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QUEEN.

Yes, I shall be easy then, and then I shall sleep.

[*King instructs Attendants to enquire without. Queen at window still.*]

KING KARNOS.

It is some man down by the river playing his lute. I am told that sometimes a man will play all night.

THARMIA.

[*Aside.*]

That's their amusement here.

AROLIND.

[*Aside.*]

Well, really, it's almost all the music we get.

THARMIA.

[*Aside.*]

It really is.

AROLIND.

[*Aside.*]

O how I cry for the golden Hall of Song in Barbul-el-Sharnak. I think it would almost hold the city of Thek.

[*Re-enter Attendant.*]

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ATTENDANT.

It is only a common lute, your Majesty. All
hear it except one man.

KING KARNOS.

All except one, did you say? Ah, thank you.
[To Queen at window.] It is only a common lute.

QUEEN.

One man did not hear it. Who was he?
Where is he? Why didn't he?

ATTENDANT.

He was riding back again to Barbul-el-Sharnak.
He was just starting. He said he did not
hear it.

QUEEN.

Oh, send for him here.

ATTENDANT.

He is gone, your Majesty.

QUEEN.

Overtake him quick. Overtake him.

[Exit Attendant.]

THARMIA.

[Aside to Arolind.]

I wish that I were going to Barbul-el-Sharnak.

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AROLIND.

O to be back again at the centre of the world !

THARMIA.

Were we not talking of the golden hall ?

AROLIND.

Ah, yes. How lovely it was ! How beautiful it was when the King was there and strange musicians came from the heathen lands with huge plumes in their hair, and played on instruments that we did not know.

THARMIA.

The Queen was better then. The music eased her.

AROLIND.

This lute player is making her quite mad.

THARMIA.

Well. Well. No wonder. He has a mournful sound. Listen !

AROLIND.

Do not let us listen. It makes me feel cold.

THARMIA.

He cannot play like Nagra or dear Trehannion. It is because we have heard Trehannion that we do not like to listen.

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AROLIND.

I do not like to listen because I feel cold.

THARMIA.

We feel cold because the Queen has opened the casement. [To Attendant.] Find the man that is playing the lute and give him this and let him cease to play upon his lute.

[Exit Attendant.]

ICHTHARION.

Hark! He is playing still.

KING KARNOS.

Yes, we all hear him: it is only a man. [To another or same Attendant.] Let him stop playing.

ATTENDANT.

Yes, your Majesty.

[Exit.]

[Enter an Attendant with another.]

ATTENDANT.

This is the man that does not hear the lute.

KING KARNOS.

Ah. You are deaf, are you not?

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MAN.

No, your Majesty.

KING KARNOS.

You hear me clearly ?

MAN.

Yes, your Majesty.

KING KARNOS.

Listen !

* * *

Now you hear the lute ?

MAN.

No, your Majesty.

KING KARNOS.

Who sent you to Barbul-el-Sharnak ?

MAN.

The captain of the camel-guard sent me, your
Majesty.

KING KARNOS.

Then go and never return. You are deaf and
also a fool. [To himself.] The Queen will not
sleep. [To another.] Bring music, bring music
quickly. [Muttering.] The Queen will not sleep.

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[*The man bows low and departs. He says farewell to a sentry. The Queen leans from the casement muttering. Music heard off.*]

QUEEN.

Ah, that is earthly music, but of that other tune
I have a fear.

KING KARNOS.

We have all heard it. Comfort yourself. Calm
yourself.

QUEEN.

One man does not hear it.

KING KARNOS.

But he has gone away. We all hear it now.

[*Enter Attendant.*]

QUEEN.

I wish that I could see him.

KING KARNOS.

A man is a small thing and the night is very
large and full of wonders. You may well not
see him.

QUEEN.

I should like to see him. Why cannot I see
him?

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KING KARNOS.

I have sent the camel-guard to search for him and to stop him playing his lute. [To Ichtarion.] Do not let the Queen know about this prophecy. She would think . . . I do not know what she would think.

ICHTHARION.

No, your Majesty.

KING KARNOS.

The Queen has a very special fear of the gods.

ICHTHARION.

Yes, your Majesty.

QUEEN.

You speak of me?

KING KARNOS.

O no. We speak of the gods.

[*The earthly music ceases.*

QUEEN.

O do not speak of the gods. The gods are very terrible; all the dooms that shall ever be come forth from the gods. In misty windings of the wandering hills they forge the future even as on an anvil. The future frightens me.

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KING KARNOS.

Call the Queen's maidens. Send quickly for her maidens. Do not let the future frighten you.

QUEEN.

Men laugh at the gods; they often laugh at the gods. I am more sure that the gods laugh too. It is dreadful to think of the laughter of the gods. O the lute! the lute! How clearly I hear the lute. But you all hear it. Do you not? You swear that you all hear it.

KING KARNOS.

Yes, yes. We all hear the lute. It is only a man playing.

QUEEN.

I wish I could see him. Then I should know that he was only a man and not Gog-Owza, most terrible of the gods. I should be able to sleep then.

KING KARNOS.

[*Soothingly.*]

Yes, yes.

[*Enter Attendant.*]

Here comes the man that I have sent to find

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him. You have found the lute player. Tell the Queen that you have found the lute player.

ATTENDANT.

The camel-guard have sought, your Majesty, and cannot find any man that is playing a lute.

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

Three days elapse.

THARMIA.

We have done too much. We have done too much. Our husbands will be put to death. The Prophet will betray them and they will be put to death.

AROLIND.

O what shall we do ?

THARMIA.

It would have been better for us to be clothed with rags than to bring our husbands to death by what we have done.

AROLIND.

We have done too much and we have angered a king, and (who knows?) we may have angered even the gods.

THARMIA.

Even the gods ! We are become like Helen. When my mother was a child she saw her once. She says she was the quietest and gentlest of

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creatures and only wished to be loved, and yet because of her there was a war for four or five years at Troy, and the city was burned which had remarkable towers ; and some of the gods of the Greeks took her side, my mother says, and some she says were against her, and they quarrelled upon Olympus where they live, and all because of Helen.

AROLIND.

O don't, don't. It frightens me. I only want to be prettily dressed and see my husband happy.

THARMIA.

Have you seen the Prophet ?

AROLIND.

Oh, yes, I have seen him. He walks about the palace. He is free but he cannot escape.

THARMIA.

What does he look like ? Has he a frightened look ?

AROLIND.

He mutters as he walks. Sometimes he weeps ; and then he puts his cloak over his face.

THARMIA.

I fear that he will betray them.

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AROLIND.

I do not trust a prophet. He is the go-between
of gods and men. They are so far apart. How
can he be true to both?

THARMIA.

This Prophet is false to the gods. It is a hate-
ful thing for a prophet to prophesy falsely.

[*Prophet walks across hanging his head
and muttering.*]

PROPHET.

The gods have spoken a lie. The gods have
spoken a lie. Can all their vengeance ever atone
for this?

THARMIA.

He spoke of vengeance.

AROLIND.

O he will betray them.

[*They weep. Enter Queen.*]

QUEEN.

Why do you weep? Ah, you are going to die.
You heard the death-lute. You do well to weep.

THARMIA.

No, your Majesty. It is the man that has
played for the last three days. We all heard him.

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QUEEN.

Three days. Yes, yes, it is three days. Gog-Owza plays no longer than three days. Gog-Owza grows weary then. He has given his message and he will go away.

THARMIA.

We have all heard him, your Majesty, except the deaf young man that went back to Barbul-el-Sharnak. We hear him now.

QUEEN.

Yes! But nobody has seen him yet. My maidens have searched for him but they have not found him.

THARMIA.

Your Majesty, my husband heard him, and Ludibras, and while they live we know there is nothing to fear. If the King grew angry with them—because of any idle story that some jealous man might tell—some criminal wishing to postpone his punishment—if the King were to grow angry with them they would open their veins; they would never survive his anger. Then we should all of us say, “Perhaps it was Gog-Owza that Ichtharion or Ludibras heard.”

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QUEEN.

The King will never grow angry with Ichtharion or Ludibras.

THARMIA.

Your Majesty would not sleep if the King grew angry with them.

QUEEN.

Oh, no. I should not sleep; it would be terrible.

THARMIA.

Your Majesty would be wakeful all night long and cry.

QUEEN.

Oh, yes. I should not sleep; I should cry all night.

[*Exit.*]

AROLIND.

She has no influence with the King.

THARMIA.

No. But he hates to hear her cry all night.

[*Enter Ichtharion.*]

I am sure that that Prophet will betray you. But we have spoken to the Queen. We have told

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her it would be dreadful if the King were angry with you, and she thinks she will cry all night if he is angry.

ICHTHARION.

Poor frightened brain ! How strong are little fancies ! She should be a beautiful Queen. But she goes about white and crying, in fear of the gods. The gods, that are no more than shadows in the moonlight. Man's fear rises weird and large in all this mystery and makes a shadow of himself upon the ground and Man jumps and says "the gods." Why, they are less than shadows ; we have seen shadows ; we have not seen the gods.

THARMIA.

O do not speak like that. There used to be gods. They overthrew Bleth dreadfully. And if they still live on in the dark of the hills, why ! they might hear your words.

ICHTHARION.

Why ! you grow frightened, too. Do not be frightened. We will go and speak with the Prophet, while you follow the Queen ; be much with her, and do not let her forget that she will cry if the King should be angry with us.

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AROLIND.

I am almost afraid when I am with the Queen:
I do not like to be with her.

THARMIA.

She could not hurt us; she is afraid of all
things.

AROLIND.

She makes me have huge fears of prodigious
things.

[*Exeunt Tharmia and Arolind.*]

[*Enter Ludibras.*]

LUDIBRAS.

The Prophet is coming this way.

ICHTHARION.

Sit down. We must speak with him. He will
betray us.

LUDIBRAS.

Why should the Prophet betray us?

ICHTHARION.

Because the guilt of the false prophecy is not
his guilt; it is ours; and the King may spare him
if he tells him that. Again, he mutters of venge-
ance as he walks; many have told me.

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LUDIBRAS.

The King will not spare him even if he betrays us. It was he that spoke the false prophecy to the King.

ICHTHARION.

The King does not in his heart believe in the gods. It is for cheating him that the Prophet is to die. But if he knows we had planned it . . .

LUDIBRAS.

What can we say to the Prophet?

ICHTHARION.

Why, we can say nothing. But we can learn what he will do from what he says to us.

LUDIBRAS.

Here he is. We must remember everything that he says.

ICHTHARION.

Watch his eyes.

[Enter the Prophet, his eyes concealed by his cloak.]

ICHTHARION AND LUDIBRA

The gods are good.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

They are benignant.

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ICHTHARION.

I am much to blame. I am very much to blame.

LUDIBRAS.

We trust that the King will relent.

ICHTHARION.

He often relents at sunset; he looks out over the orchids in the evening. They are very beautiful then, and if he is angry his anger passes away just when the cool breeze comes at the set of sun.

LUDIBRAS.

He is sure to relent at sunset.

ICHTHARION.

Do not be angry. I am indeed to blame. Do not be angry.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

I do not wish the King to relent at sunset.

ICHTHARION.

Do not be angry.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

It hath been said of old that the gods cannot lie. It is written and hath been said. I have

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plotted with you and I have made them lie, for
my voice is the voice of the gods.

LUDIBRAS.

We hope that the King will pardon you.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

I wish to die.

ICHTHARION.

No, no, we will pray the King to pardon you.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

I wish to die.

LUDIBRAS.

No, no.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

Because of me the holy gods have lied ; they
that have spoken sooth through a thousand proph-
ets. Because of me they have lied. They will
be proudly silent for evermore and inspire no
prophet again, and the nations will wander
blindly and fall unwarned to their doom, or
stray away and be lost in unchronicled time. Or
though they should speak again yet how shall
Man believe them ? I have brought a bane upon
the generations that have not yet known the
world.

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ICHTHARION.

No. No. Do not say that.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

And my name shall be a curse upon the lips of
many nations crowding to their doom.

ICHTHARION.

Do not be unhappy. All men must die, but to
die unhappy . . .

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

I have betrayed the gods who spake by me!

ICHTHARION.

Do not be unhappy.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

I say to you that I have betrayed the gods.

ICHTHARION.

Listen to me. Do not be so unhappy. There
are no gods. Everybody knows that there are no
gods. The King knows it.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

You have heard their Prophet lie and believe
that the gods are dead.

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LUDIBRAS.

There are indeed no gods. It is well known.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

There are gods, and they have a vengeance even for you. Listen and I will tell you what it shall be. Aye and for you also . . . Listen! . . . No, no, they are silent in the gloom of the hills. They have not spoken to me since I lied.

ICHTHARION.

You are right; the gods will punish us. It is natural that they should not speak just now; but they will certainly punish us. It is not therefore necessary for any man to avenge himself upon us, even though there were any cause.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

It is not necessary.

ICHTHARION.

Indeed, it might even further anger the gods if a man should be before them to punish us.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

The gods are very swift; no man outruns them.

LUDIBRAS.

A man would be rash to attempt to.

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VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

The sun is falling low. I will leave you now, for I have ever loved the sun at evening. I go to watch it drop through the gilded clouds, and make a wonder of familiar things. After the sunset, night, and after an evil deed, the vengeance of the gods.

[*Exit R.*]

LUDIBRAS.

He really believes in the gods.

ICHTHARION.

He is as mad as the Queen ; we must humour his madness if we ever see him more. I think that all will be well.

[*An executioner steals after the Prophet ; he is dressed in crimson satin to the knees ; he wears a leather belt and carries the axe of his trade.*].

LUDIBRAS.

His voice was angry as he went away. I fear he may yet betray us.

ICHTHARION.

It is not likely. He thinks that the gods will punish us.

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LUDIBRAS.

How long will he think so? The Queen's
fancies change thrice an hour.

ICHTHARION.

The executioner keeps very close to him now.
He comes closer every hour. There is not much
time for him to change his fancies.

LUDIBRAS.

He has the will to betray us if that fancy leaves
him.

ICHTHARION.

The executioner is very eager for him. He in-
vented a new stroke lately, but he has not had a
man since we came to Thek.

LUDIBRAS.

I do not like an eager executioner—the King
sees him and it makes him think . . .

ICHTHARION.

Look how low the sun is; he has no time to
betray us. The King is not yet here.

LUDIBRAS.

He is coming.

ICHTHARION.

But the Prophet is not here.

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LUDIBRAS.

No, he is not yet come.

[Enter the King.]

KING KARNOS.

The Queen's maidens have persuaded her that there is nothing to fear. They are quite excellent; they shall dance before me. The Queen will sleep; they are quite excellent. Ah, Ichtharion. Come to me, Ichtharion.

LUDIBRAS.

Why does the King send for you?

KING KARNOS.

You were wrong, Ichtharion.

ICHTHARION.

Your Majesty!

[*Ludibras watches.*]

KING KARNOS.

You were wrong to think that Thek is not very lovely.

ICHTHARION.

Yes, I was wrong and I am much to blame.

KING KARNOS.

Yes, it is very beautiful at evening. I will watch the sun go down over the orchids. I will

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never see Barbul-el-Sharnak any more. I will sit
and watch the sun go down on the orchids till it
is gone and all their colours fade.

ICHTHARION.

It is very beautiful now. How still it is! I
have never seen so still a sunset before.

KING KARNOS.

It is like a picture done by a dying painter,
full of a beautiful colour. Even if all these
orchids died to-night yet their beauty is an in-
destructible memory.

LUDIBRAS.

[*Aside to Ichtharion.*]

The Prophet is coming this way.

ICHTHARION.

Your Majesty, the Prophet walks about the
palace, and the executioner is close behind him.
If the Queen saw him and the executioner would
it not trouble her? Were it not better that he
be killed at once? Shall I whistle now to the
executioner?

KING KARNOS.

Not now. I said at sunset.

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ICHTHARION.

Your Majesty, it is merciful to kill a man before the set of sun. For it is natural in a man to love the sun. But to see it set and to know that it will not come again is even a second death. It would be merciful to kill him now.

KING KARNOS.

I have said—at sunset. It were unjust to kill him before his prophecy is proven false.

ICHTHARION.

But, your Majesty, we know that it is false. He also knows it.

KING KARNOS.

He shall die at sunset.

LUDIBRAS.

Your Majesty, the Prophet will pray for life if he is not killed now. It would be a pity to grant it.

KING KARNOS.

Is not a king's word death? I have said he shall die at sunset.

[Enter Prophet. *The Executioner creeps along close behind him.*]

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VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

O the gods are about to have lied. The gods will have lied. I have prophesied falsely and the gods will have lied. My death cannot atone for it nor the punishment of others.

[*Ichtharion and Ludibras start.*]

ICHTHARION.

He will betray us yet.

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

O why did you let your voice come through my lips? O why did you allow your voice to lie? For centuries it has been said from city to city "The gods cannot lie." The nomads have known it out upon the plains. The mountaineers have known it near the dawn. That is all over now. O King, let me die at once. For I have prophesied falsely and at sunset the gods will lie.

KING KARNOS.

It is not sunset yet. No doubt you have spoken truly.

[*Enter Queen.*]

How well the Queen looks. Her maidens are quite excellent.

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LUDIBRAS.

[*To Ichtharion.*]

There is something a little dreadful in seeing the Queen so calm. She is like a windless sunset in the Winter before a hurricane comes and the snow swirls up before it over the world.

ICHTHARION.

I do not like calm sunsets ; they make me think that something is going to happen. Yes, the Queen is very quiet ; she will sleep to-night.

QUEEN.

I am not frightened any longer. All the wild fancies of my brain have left it. I have often troubled you with little fears. Now they are all at rest and I am afraid no longer.

KING KARNOS.

That is good ; I am very glad. You will sleep to-night.

QUEEN.

Sleep. Why—yes, I shall sleep. O yes, we shall all sleep.

KING KARNOS.

Your maidens have told you that there is nothing to fear.

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QUEEN.

Nothing to fear? No, no more little fears to trouble me.

KING KARNOS.

They have told you there is nothing at all to fear. Indeed there is nothing.

QUEEN.

No more little fears. There is one great fear.

KING KARNOS.

A great fear! Why, what is it?

QUEEN.

I must not say. For you have often soothed me when I was frightened, and it were not well for me to trouble you at the last.

KING KARNOS.

What is your fear? Shall I send again for your maidens?

QUEEN.

No, it is not my fear. It is all men's fear if they knew.

KING KARNOS.

[*Glancing round.*]

Ah, you have seen my man in red. I will send him away. I will.

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QUEEN.

No, no. My fear is not earthly. I am not afraid of little things any more.

KING KARNOS.

Why, what is it then ?

QUEEN.

I do not quite know. But you know how I have ever feared the gods. The gods are going to do some dreadful thing.

KING KARNOS.

Believe me ; the gods do nothing nowadays.

QUEEN.

You have indeed been very good to me. It seems a little while since the camels came to Argun-Zeerith by the iris marshes, the camels with the gold-hung palanquin, and the bells above their heads, high up in air, the silver bridal bells. It seems a very little while ago. I did not know how swift the end would come.

KING KARNOS.

What end ? To whom is the end coming ?

QUEEN.

Do not be troubled. We should not let Fate trouble us. The World and its daily cares, ah,

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they are frightful: but Fate—I smile at Fate.
Fate cannot hurt us if we smile at it.

KING KARNOS.

What end do you say is coming?

QUEEN.

I do not know. Something that has been shall
soon be no more.

KING KARNOS.

No, no. Look upon Thek. It is built of rock
and our palace is all of marble. Time has not
scratched it with six centuries. Six tearing cen-
turies with all their claws. We are throned on
gold and founded upon marble. Death will some
day find me, indeed, but I am young. Sire after
sire of mine has died in Barbul-el-Sharnak or in
Thek, but has left our dynasty laughing sheer in
the face of Time from over these age-old walls.

QUEEN.

Say farewell to me now, lest something happen.

KING KARNOS.

No, no, we will not say unhappy things.

EXECUTIONER.

The sun has set.

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KING KARNOS.

Not yet. The jungle hides it. It is not yet set. Look at the beautiful light upon the orchids. For how long they have flashed their purple on the gleaming walls of Thek. For how long they will flash there on our immortal palace, immortal in marble and immortal in song. Ah, how the colour changes. [To the Executioner.] The sun is set. Take him away. [To the Queen.] It is he whose end you foresaw.

[*The Executioner grips the Prophet by the arm.*]

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

The gods have lied !

KING KARNOS.

The jungle is sinking ! It has fallen into the earth !

[*The Queen smiles a little, holding his hand.*]

The city is falling in ! The houses are rolling towards us !

[*Thunder off.*]

ICHTHARION.

They are coming up like a wave and a darkness is coming with them.

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[*Loud and prolonged thunder. Flashes of red light and then total darkness. A little light comes back, showing recumbent figures, shattered pillars and rocks of white marble. The Prophet's back is broken, but he raises the fore-part of his body for a moment.*]

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

[*Triumphantly.*]

They have not lied !

ICHTHARION.

O, I am killed.

[*Laughter heard off.*]

Some one is laughing. Laughing even in Thek !
Why, the whole city is shattered.

[*The laughter grows demoniac.*]

What is that dreadful sound ?

VOICE-OF-THE-GODS.

It is the laughter of the gods that cannot lie,
going back to their hills.

[*He dies.*]

CURTAIN.

